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STAY ALIVE!

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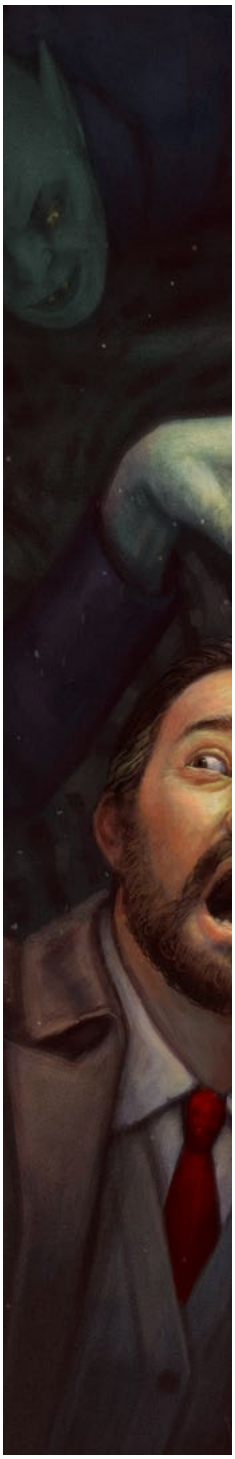

I've always enjoyed the horror genre, even when I was young. I grew up in the 1980s, smack dab in the middle of the "Satanic panic" about roleplaying games, which also happened to be when slasher films like *A Nightmare on Elm Street* were at the height of their popularity. I remember being on camping trips with my dad telling scary stories about the hook-handed killer (and his local cryptid cousin, the Proctor Valley monster). I watched *The Thing* over and over on VHS until the tape wore out (and did a presentation in my tenth-grade literature class about the horror genre). *The Terminator* was the first R-rated film I saw in a theater (my cousin and I snuck in because I was 13 and he was 15). The gamer kids from *Stranger Things* are exactly the same age as I was in 1983 (the year the show is set). My teenage gaming group fought against the xenomorphs from *Alien* and *Aliens*.

Instead of acid for blood, it seems I have horror in my blood.

In my career as a game designer, I've written about a lot of creepy stuff—ghosts for D&D's Ravenloft setting, genocidal racists for Greyhawk, an iteration of the World of Darkness (with Monte!), biblical Hell, and more—so it's no surprise that I called dibs on writing the horror sourcebook for the Cypher System and cramming it full of quotes and references to my favorite movies and TV shows from the past forty years. This is also the largest book I've worked on as a solo author, and I'm going to need to read, watch, and write a lot of happy, joyful things to counteract all the crazy research I've been doing. My browser history probably has triggered several flags at the FBI, and I've made some weird phone calls (including asking blood banks and bloodmobiles how much blood they have in storage).

I'd like to give special thanks to MCG's Bear, Darcy, and Shanna, who asked really good questions about vampire PCs in the 2019 summit playtest, Susan Morris for pointing out that milk is basically blood (and all that entails for hungry vampires), and Bear again for his various weird suggestions and off-color comments during the vampire playtest (like the idea of a "blood vending machine: put a cow in one side, get blood from the other side").

Please enjoy my creepy, possessed, tattooed, literary baby . . . and don't forget to *Stay Alive!*

To end on a serious note: Remember that all of the horror we're talking about in this book is *fictional* horror. Don't emulate real or fictional crimes, horrors, or other offenses against people, animals, or property. Keep all of that stuff in the game, not in real life.

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This chapter is intended for GMs and players.

Humans love being scared. We watch horror films and scary television shows, read scary books, attend haunted houses and zombie festivals, torment each other with pranks, and even have national holidays where the entire purpose is for adults and children to enjoy and embrace the idea of fear. We're oddly comfortable with the idea of fear and horror as something to entertain us.

That acceptance of horror is probably a significant part of the weirdest and most amazing thing about horror: you can make it part of *anything*. It's such a broad topic that it barely counts as its own genre, but by mixing it with something else (families, teenage drama, science fiction, and so on) it becomes a distinct and amplified aspect of whatever it is attached to. You can add it to things that are innocuous, cute, or even wholesome and create something that is genuinely shocking or frightening. Babies are cute, but zombie babies are terrifying and weird. Weddings are a joyous occasion, except when the bride is a vampire. Balloons are fun, unless the person giving them away is a monstrous clown.

Horror in roleplaying games is no different than in other media, except the players are taking on the roles of the characters in the story instead of merely watching or reading them. It doesn't matter what kind of game you're running (or what game system you're using)—you can mix in a little horror and bring something new to it. Even children's games can handle some (age-appropriate) horror and bring a good scare.

Throughout this book, you'll see page references to various items accompanied by this symbol. These are page references to the *Cypher System Rulebook*, where you can find additional details about that rule, ability, creature, or concept.

DEFINING HORROR GENRES

"Horror" is a broad category that includes such widely different subjects as Dracula, the works of Edgar Allan Poe, and the *Friday the 13th* film franchise. Horror is usually divided into

USING *STAY ALIVE!*

Stay Alive! is a companion to the *Cypher System Rulebook*. This means you won't find introductions to the Cypher System, how to create characters, full rules of the game, or other related concepts here. *Stay Alive!* assumes you've got all that in the *Cypher System Rulebook*, and that you're ready to dive right into some horror-specific content.

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genres just to clarify what kind of horror you're talking about. The following is an incomplete list of horror genres, a brief explanation of what each one is, and examples of creatures or sources that fit that type of horror. *Stay Alive!* refers to these categories often, so you should be familiar with these concepts as you read the rest of the book. Most of these genres are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6: Horror Genres.

Aliens: Includes stories of hostile creatures from other worlds attacking or invading human-controlled areas (such as Earth or a spacecraft) and alien abduction. Examples: the *Alien* franchise, *They Live*, and *The Thing*.

Apocalyptic: The end of the world and the struggles of the last survivors. Overlaps with survival horror, except this has a more global and permanent focus. May overlap with other genres taken to an extreme or logical conclusion (particularly zombies). Examples: *Bird Box*, *A Quiet Place*, *The Road*.

Body Horror: Graphic or psychologically disturbing alterations to the human body. Examples: *District 9*, *The Fly*, *Videodrome*.

Child Protagonists: The protagonists are children, often without any effective support from adults. Examples: *Coraline*, *It*, *Stranger Things*.

Clowns: Creepy people in the guise of being funny. Examples: *It*, the Joker, *Killer Klowns From Outer Space*.

Comedy Horror: Mixing horror with comedy and embracing how they blend together. Examples: *Evil Dead II*, *Shaun of the Dead*, *What We Do in the Shadows*.

Creepy Kids: Focusing on strange children, perhaps with murder or supernatural influences added. Examples: "Children of the Corn," *The Omen*, *Village of the Damned*.

Cryptids: A catch-all category for stories featuring obscure creatures, monsters not normally appearing in horror films, or new fictional monsters. Examples: *The Babadook*, *The Mothman Prophecies*, *Trollhunter*.

Dark Magic and the Occult: Evil spells, nefarious religious organizations, and cursed objects. Examples: *Hereditary*, *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, *The Wicker Man*.

Chapter 6: Horror Genres, page 36

Memorable Horror Moment: *The scene in* Alien Resurrection *when they find the medical lab with all of the failed Ripley clones . . . and one successful one.*

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Some of these examples include things that aren't quite horror but are memorable examples of their genre that could easily be pushed into the horror category. For example, Blade Runner *is neo-noir science fiction, but its replicants would work great as antagonists in a horror scenario.*

Degenerates: Individuals, families, or groups that practice human cannibalism. Often goes hand in hand with inbreeding and violence against outsiders, and over multiple generations can quickly "evolve" into something that is no longer human. Examples: *The Descent*, *The Road*, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.

Demons: Extradimensional evils desiring blood, souls, and the infliction of fear and pain. Examples: *The Exorcist*, *Fallen* (1998), *Hellraiser*.

Doppelgangers: Imitating human shape and identity, and questioning the reality of one's own self. Examples: *Annihilation*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Moon*.

Ghosts: Bodiless remnants of dead people lingering in the mortal world, usually with harmful intent toward the living. Examples: *Poltergeist*, *The Ring*, *The Sixth Sense*.

Gothic Horror: Combines fiction with horror, death, and sometimes romance. Examples: *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, "The Fall of the House of Usher."

Haunting: A building, structure, or person that experiences unusual and (typically) harmful interactions with supernatural entities such as ghosts or demons. Example: *The Amityville Horror*, *The Others*, *Stir of Echoes*.

J-Horror and K-Horror: Japan's and Korea's takes on the horror genre, usually relying on mystery, suspense, suffering, and revenge. Examples: *Dark Water*, *Ju-On*, *Oldboy*.

Killer Toys: The playthings of children, animated by magic or technology for murderous intent. Examples: *Child's Play*, *Poltergeist*, *Tales From the Hood*.

Lovecraftian: Forgotten lore and powerful ancient entities that damage the sanity of humans who learn too much about them. Examples: *At the Mountains of Madness*, "The Dunwich Horror," *The Whisperer in Darkness*.

Machines and Robots: Machine entities threatening or infiltrating human spaces, usually without emotion and intending genocide. Examples: the Borg, *The Matrix*, *The Terminator*.

Mummies: Preserved and reanimated corpses, usually Egyptian, fraught with curses and strange abilities. Examples: various films called *The Mummy*.

Psychological Horror: Relies on mental, emotional, and psychological states to create fear and dread, where the intensity is usually built through atmosphere and internal events rather than external threats like monsters. Examples: *The Shining*, *The Silence of the Lambs*, the *Silent Hill* videogame.

Revenant: Someone returns from the dead (or seems to) in order to right a wrong, enact vengeance, or complete a vital task. Examples: *American Gods*, *Creepshow*, *The Revenant*.

Science Gone Wrong: Pushing the application and consequences of scientific discoveries without any concern for the ethics of that research. Examples: *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, *Scanners*, *Stranger Things*.

Simulacra: Independent living things created by artificial means like genetic engineering, cadaver surgery, or exploratory cloning. Examples: *Alien Resurrection*, *Blade Runner*, *Frankenstein*.

Slashers: Murderous maniacs who enjoy hunting people in dramatic (and usually gory) ways, sometimes for revenge but often for no reason at all. Examples: *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Friday the 13th*, *Halloween*.

Survival Horror: People threatened by dangerous animals or severe natural phenomena (such as avalanches

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and volcanoes). Examples: *The Birds*, *Contagion*, *Jaws*.

Unreliable Narrator: The protagonist dealing with horrific events is an unreliable narrator, perhaps due to insanity or past trauma. Examples: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Jacob's Ladder*, *Memento*, *Shutter Island*.

Urban Gothic: Set in the industrial and post-industrial period of history, almost exclusively taking place in modern cities (with factories, hospitals, and similar features) with modern sensibilities and fears about the conditions in those places. Examples: *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, the murders attributed to Jack the Ripper.

Vampires: Undead people who feast on human blood. Examples: *Dracula*, *Nosferatu*, *Salem's Lot*.

Weird West: Combines elements of American westerns and horror, occult, fantasy, or science fiction. Examples: the *Deadlands* RPG, Jonah Hex comics, *Pale Rider*.

Werewolves: People who turn into feral monsters, usually because of the full moon. Examples: *An American Werewolf in London*, *Ginger Snaps*, *Underworld*.

Zombies: Mindless corpses, usually in large numbers, in search of human flesh and brains to eat. Examples: *28 Days Later*, *Night of the Living Dead*, *The Walking Dead*.

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This chapter is intended for GMs but is safe for players to read.

The first step in running a horror game is figuring out what setting you want to use—what you want the world of your game to be like. This involves answering basic questions such as: is it on Earth, another world, or something in between? Is it the present day, the past, or the future? Horror adds other questions to that list, such as: are there any horror creatures in it (aliens, demons, ghosts, and so on), or is it purely based on scary things we might encounter in real life? Do regular people know about the creepy things in your setting, or are they blissfully ignorant? If there are multiple kinds of horrors (like a world with vampires and werewolves), how do they interact with each other? This chapter walks you through ways to quickly put together a horror setting that draws on existing work, how to craft your own setting from scratch, and how to mix the two of them.

Memorable Horror Moment: *The chest burster scene from* Alien.

Using a Published Horror Game Setting

Horror is a fairly popular roleplaying genre, and many RPGs include a detailed setting, often with hundreds of pages and multiple sourcebooks. Using that setting (whether you're using its rule system, the Cypher System, or something else entirely) is a really easy way to have a world ready to run a game in, and most of them also include adventures that are ready to play. Here are a few examples of horror RPGs that you can immediately use:

Call of Cthulhu: This game is set in the fictional 1920s of the Lovecraftian mythos, and the PCs are academics, investigators, socialites, and other period-appropriate characters thrust into conflicts with events and creatures that may drive them insane. If you're already planning to use Lovecraftian elements in your horror game and want

Informed Consent

The idea of running a horror game is that the GM *wants* to scare the players and the players *want* to be scared. But it's one thing to scare someone with the idea of a vampire (which they know is fictional) and a very different thing to scare them with a scenario where their children are run over by a car (which can be a legitimate fear). Before you get too far along in designing a horror setting that might traumatize a player with something they don't want to think about, check in with all the players to see what sort of horror they're comfortable experiencing. This is explained in Chapter 3: Consent in Horror. Once you know what topics are acceptable for all of your players, you can proceed with designing the game setting.

Chapter 3: Consent in Horror, page 19

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more than the original stories set in that genre, CoC is an excellent resource. (The Delta Green RPG advances the setting to the modern era and adds conspiracy theories.)

Deadlands: A mix of Western, horror, and steampunk. An event in 1863 gave supernatural entities called the Reckoners a foothold in the world, allowing spirits, zombies, and monsters to roam free. It's worth a read if you want a horror setting that isn't set in the modern day with typical modern-day villains.

Puppetland: In this grim fairy tale game, the puppet Punch has killed the Maker of Puppets and now terrorizes a nightmare realm with his nutcracker minions. PCs play puppet freedom fighters helping other puppets and hoping to bring down Punch himself. It's weird and strange and unlike typical RPGs, and it would make an excellent one-shot horror game night.

Shadow of the Demon Lord: This game presents an amoral fantasy world on the brink of an apocalypse. Amoral PCs balance sanity and corruption as they complete quests, earn their legacy, and perhaps delay the ascension of the Demon Lord that wants to consume everything.

Vampire: The Masquerade: A "gothic-punk" version of our modern world (called the "World of Darkness") where vampires secretly control everything and newly created PC vampires try to navigate undead politics and threats. The World of Darkness also (optionally) includes parallel games about PC werewolves, mages, ghosts, and other supernatural creatures. There's no reason you can't flip the narrative so the PCs are living humans struggling against a world of monsters.

Remember that you can always change elements of a published setting to suit what you want to do for your horror game. Not only does this let you put your own unique stamp on the world you're creating, but it makes sure the players can't predict what scares await them. For example, stories in the Lovecraftian mythos don't include ghosts, and players familiar with those stories may know that and assume that anything appearing to be a ghost is actually an extradimensional or extraterrestrial creature; deciding that your Lovecraftian setting in fact has ghosts allows you to expose the players to a kind of fear they weren't expecting in that genre. Your version of the World of Darkness might only have vampires, or perhaps there are some werewolves left but they were enslaved by the vampires long ago and are otherwise considered legendary creatures.

Killer toys, page 62

Borrowing from Another Source

Our world is rich with sources of horror that you can loot for your game—films, novels, comics, short stories, TV shows, videogames, and more. Because you're reading this book, we can assume you're enough of a horror fan to know about many of them and can do an internet search to find more. It's likely you've been inspired to run a horror game strongly based on your favorite piece of horror.

Memorable Horror Moment: *When you first notice the subliminal white demon face in* The Exorcist.

Good. Do it. Loot it. Be shameless or even blatant about it.

There's absolutely nothing wrong with wanting to run some PCs through the plot of your favorite horror movie, TV show, or comic book. Your enthusiasm about the source will be contagious and the players will feel the excitement you

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have about the scenario. If the players aren't familiar with the story, then it's just like they're playing in a published adventure that you know well. (And once they've finished, you have the option of telling them to watch or read the source that inspired the game.) If the players are familiar with the source material, maybe you'll change some details so they can't predict exactly what's going to happen. Or maybe you leave the details the same, and the challenge is for the PCs to accomplish what happened in the original source without anyone dying, or to see how the randomness of the dice, GM intrusions, and player choices make the game's outcome different than the original.

Just like with using a published horror RPG setting, you can make changes to the source in order to fit your plan for the game. Maybe your scenario is *Alien*, but set on an ice planet, and instead of the xenomorph having acid for blood, its blood ignites upon contact with air. Or your game is based on *Child's Play*, but with a soldier toy that connects wirelessly to the internet for updates and personalization. Or it's *The Thing*, except the creature was frozen on an island off the coast of Chile or Alaska. These kinds of tweaks are what make new horror stories memorable, and it's that sort of creativity that establishes new horror genres.

An example of tweaking an established idea is the novel Christine*; Stephen King took the concept of a haunted house and changed it to make a story about a haunted car.*

Perhaps Regan using a Ouija board early in The Exorcist *made her a target for the demon, but that's not clear.*

CREATING A NEW SETTING

If you're willing to put in the work, there's nothing quite as satisfying as developing your own horror setting. This section jump-starts the brainstorming process if you're drawing a blank or in a hurry. Even if you already have a good idea of what you want it to be about, these guidelines can help you fill in some broad strokes or think up a unique twist.

Chapter 5: Advice for Running a Horror Game covers how to run a horror game and make it scary, page 24.

THE FIVE W QUESTIONS

The "Five W questions" are a set of questions (each starting with the letter "W") for basic information gathering. The questions are Who, What, When, Where, and Why (and sometimes How is part of this list). By answering these questions about your horror game, you establish the core of the narrative, and you can fill in additional information from there as needed. Specifically for horror, you might phrase these questions as follows:

- Who is responsible for the horror?
- What is the horror?
- When did the horror begin?
- Where is the horror happening?
- Why is the horror happening?

To use *The Exorcist* as an example, the answers to those questions are:

- A demon (Pazuzu)
- A child is possessed by a demon
- As of a few weeks ago
- In the child's home in Georgetown
- Because demons enjoy corrupting people

The How question becomes:

- How can the PCs interact with and eliminate this threat?

For *The Exorcist*, the answer to the How question is "by verifying that the child is actually possessed (instead of delusional) and performing an exorcism."

For your new horror campaign, you can start answering the Five W questions as soon as ideas come to you. It's all right to change your answers, especially if a new answer to one question means

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another answer no longer makes sense. If you don't have all the answers yet or don't like the answers you've come up with so far, move on to the next section in this chapter.

Random Inspiration

When you can't choose or are feeling uninspired, let the dice decide. The Horror Inspiration tables can help you randomly figure out aspects of your setting, which will then allow you to answer the Five W questions about it.

Horror Inspiration tables, page 15

BASE SETTING

This table gives you a broad foundation for the general setting of the game: modern, near future, far future, superheroes, war era, or some other time period of Earth. There are of course many other options, but if you haven't yet decided the game's general setting, it's best to stick to the most obvious and popular ones rather than letting the dice steer you into something you might not have even heard of (like Colonial-era New Hampshire or Portugal in the Age of Sail). The six categories are:

Modern: Happening approximately in the current year, perhaps in a generic modern city, town, or rural area. Most horror fiction and films use this setting for the sake of familiarity.

Near future: A short interval into the future (maybe five to twenty years), perhaps to let you explain why a specific theoretical piece of technology is now common (such as Wi-Fi devices implanted in our heads that allow direct communication and internet browsing, but also allow our brains to be hacked by malicious AIs), to show the consequences of a specific horror event (such as a zombie outbreak in Atlanta or vampires taking over Seattle), or to show today's children grown into adulthood and dealing with the messes we left behind (such as a machine uprising or cannibalism caused by global famine).

Far future: A more significant jump into the future, usually with the intent of having horror in a sci-fi setting, such as on a permanent moon base or an interstellar spaceship (the *Alien* franchise lives here).

Superheroes: Any time period or setting, with superheroes added. This is probably a modern campaign, but in another time period (like "World War II with superheroes") it might be just as interesting.

War era: Any war that you're reasonably familiar with. Depending on your age, education, and interest in historical films and television shows, this might be the American Civil War, World War I, World War II, Korea, Afghanistan, and so on. Not only is war horrific on its own, for a game it can also be expanded with fictional horror elements, such as werewolves aiding both sides in the American Civil War, occult Nazis in World War II, or vengeful ghosts in the Korean War.

Earth, other time period: If you're a history buff or have a favorite film set in a non-modern time period, this is your opportunity to run a non-modern game. The section on summarizing your setting for the players has quite a few suggestions.

Advising Players About Your Setting, page 16

With all six of these simple categories, the idea is to give you a recognizable setting for your game but still leave you a lot of room to explore, add ideas, and peek into dark corners. Initially you don't need additional details because later steps in this process will naturally suggest them for you.

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HORROR SOURCE

This table is a simplified list of common sources of horror—aliens, demons, ghosts, and so on. Whether this source is singular (one alien, one demon, one ghost) or multiple (a ship full of aliens, a hell full of demons, a house full of ghosts) is up to you. If this is your first time creating a horror setting, for simplicity you probably should roll on this table only once (although a second roll might be useful to show what the source seems to be, with the first roll being the actual cause).

Memorable Horror Moment: *When the twin girls first come into view in* The Shining.

EVOCATIVE HORROR ADJECTIVES

This table presents fifty weird adjectives (many of them archaic) to help describe your setting in general or things within it. Horror is weird and unsettling. Gothic horror authors were skilled at finding and creating words and phrases that evoked complex feelings of dread and unease. Although some of these words have passed out of common use (and therefore out of modern dictionaries, which focus on defining common words), they're still lurking in classic stories and older dictionaries, ready to be rediscovered and put to good use. Sometimes a smart internet search will turn up a list of useful words for horror, but it's just as likely to give you a list of kid-friendly words that aren't as helpful.

For the purpose of finding older words, I keep a 1916 edition of Webster's Collegiate Dictionary on my shelf.

Roll on this table two or three times to get a group of words that you can use singly or together to flavor your setting. If you're not familiar with a word, look it up. Think about how the word can help answer the Five W questions. If the exact word isn't inspiring you, think of a way to twist it into something else by misinterpreting it, taking its opposite definition, or using a similar-sounding word. If the word is something you normally associate with a monster or villain, try to think of a way you could use it to describe a PC.

Defining Horror Genres, page 6

For example, you roll on the table and get three random words: crepuscular, ossified, and shadowy.

- Crepuscular means "active at dawn and dusk," which is different than a typical night-active monster like a ghost or vampire. The word sounds a lot like "corpuscular," which means free-floating cells in the body (like blood cells) and also refers to a concept that light exists as tiny particles.
- Ossified means "turned into bone." Reversing that definition means to transform from bone into something else.
- Shadowy has to do with light, which coincidentally relates to crepuscular and the light-particle definition of corpuscular.

If my randomly rolled horror source is a demon or ghost, I might use these adjectives to decide that it's an entity that has been cast out of both the darkness and the light, appearing only in the half-light near sunup and sundown, and it attacks either by possessing a creature's bones or by liquefying its opponent's bones from within.

WHAT-IFS

This is an optional table; roll on it only if you're feeling weird and adventurous. Its results are a bunch of wild cards that can greatly affect the overall feel and play style of your game. Each of these options is summarized in the horror genres list in chapter 1.

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HORROR INSPIRATION TABLES

BASE SETTING

d100	Setting
01–55	Modern
56–65	Near future
66–75	Far future
76–80	Superheroes
81–90	War era
91–00	Earth, other time period

HORROR SOURCE

d100	Source
01–05	Alien
06–10	Body horror
11–15	Clown
16–19	Creepy kid
20–24	Cryptid
25–29	Dark magic
30–34	Degenerate
35–39	Demon
40–44	Doppelganger
45–49	Ghost
50–53	Haunted object
54–57	Killer toy
58–61	Lovecraftian
62–66	Machine
67–70	Mummy
71–75	Simulacra
76–80	Slasher
81–85	Survival
86–90	Vampire
91–95	Werewolf
96–00	Zombie

WHAT-IFS

d100	Speculation
01–15	Child protagonists
16–30	Comedy horror
31–50	J-horror/K-horror
51–75	Psychological horror
76–00	Unreliable narrator

EVOCATIVE HORROR ADJECTIVES

d100	Adjective
01–02	Aberrant
03–04	Abrasive
05–06	Baleful
07–08	Beastly
09–10	Bilious
11–12	Bloodcurdling
13–14	Cadaverous
15–16	Calamitous
17–18	Caustic
19–20	Chilling
21–22	Cloistered
23–24	Crepuscular
25–26	Cruel
27–28	Dapper
29–30	Deathlike
31–32	Disgusting
33–34	Dreadful
35–36	Eerie
37–38	Fecund
39–40	Formidable
41–42	Garrulous
43–44	Grim
45–46	Grisly
47–48	Impish
49–50	Incandescent
51–52	Insidious
53–54	Massive
55–56	Mutagenic
57–58	Nightmarish
59–60	Ossified
61–62	Pervasive
63–64	Petrifying
65–66	Phantasmal
67–68	Quiescent
69–70	Redolent
71–72	Repulsive
73–74	Revolting
75–76	Risky
77–78	Sanguinary
79–80	Seductive
81–82	Sepulchral
83–84	Serpentine
85–86	Shadowy
87–88	Shocking
89–90	Spidery
91–92	Tawdry
93–94	Thieving
95–96	Toxic
97–98	Treacherous
99–00	Unholy

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Percolate and Ruminate

Once you've used the Horror Inspiration tables, think on the results for a while. Write them down and keep them handy. After you watch a horror film or read a scary book, think about the results you rolled in the context of what you just saw or read. Do you have any additional insight about the Five W questions? Do the random results fit together in a way that seems interesting and fun for you? Do they remind you of a horror source that you like and could draw on for more inspiration? Repeat this process until you have answers to all Five W questions, then start filling in details about the game and the player characters' role in it.

When you have a solid idea of the game setting and what the PCs will know at the start of the game, it's time to let the players know what to expect.

Memorable Horror Moment: *The scene in* The Blair Witch Project *when Heather unwraps the bundle left outside her tent.*

Advising Players About Your Setting

Now that you've put together the basics of your setting, you need to inform the players about it so they can start preparing for the game (getting in the right mindset for that kind of horror, thinking about what sort of characters they want to create, any research they might want to do beforehand, and so on).

Because there's no specific horror genre, players may have many questions when you start running a horror game. For example, a PC might think zombies are fictional, might know that they're real but aren't something that should be walking through their neighborhood, or might not even know the basic *concept* of zombies as a fictional monster. If the players aren't aware of what their characters know, they don't know how their characters should react to seeing a zombie. Should they be scared to realize that zombies are real and one is

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standing right in front of them? Alarmed to see a zombie in the area when there shouldn't be one, like seeing a bear in a residential area? Or merely confused about why someone is (apparently) wearing makeup that makes them look like a corpse?

The best thing for the GM to do is give the players a baseline of what sort of reality the game takes place in. Your setting can be described according to five simple categories: the location, the time period, monster awareness, monster reality, and horror popularity.

Location Examples: Earth, the moon, a generic medieval fantasy world, a space station in orbit around Mars, a desert planet, an ice planet

Time Period Examples: Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman Empire, European Middle Ages, Elizabethan Era, American Colonial Period, American Revolution, American Civil War, Gilded Age, World War I, Roaring 20s and the Great Depression (Lovecraftian era), World War II, 1950s, 1970s, 1980s, modern day (internet age), near future (within twenty years), far future (a hundred or more years out), distant future (a thousand or more years out).

Monster Awareness: Nonexistent, basic (most people only know about Halloween monsters), informed (people know a mix of folklore creatures such as demons, what we now call "classic Universal movie monsters," and contemporary legends), high (people know their favorite monster like they know their favorite food, kind of pet, or celebrity)

Monster Reality: Denied (no believable evidence that monsters exist), suspected (enough indirect evidence out there that most people believe they exist, with ghosts being a common example), absolute (everyone believes monsters are as real as cats and dogs)

Memorable Horror Moment: *The heart attack scene from* The Thing.

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Given the risky things that many horror movie characters do (like running off to have sex even though there's a chainsaw killer on the loose), it's often assumed that the world they live in doesn't have horror as a genre. They don't know any better because they've never seen a horror movie. This is represented by the "ignorant horror popularity" option.

Horror Popularity: Ignorant, fringe (horror is not a typical form of entertainment), mainstream (people watch scary movies at Halloween and are familiar with some horror tropes), ubiquitous (horror is as much a part of pop culture as romantic comedies, superheroes, and action blockbusters)

By combining these concepts, you can give the players (and their characters) a solid one- or two-sentence foundation about what to expect in the game. Here are several examples:

- *Earth, Elizabethan Era, informed monster awareness, absolute monster reality, ignorant horror popularity.* People of Shakespeare's day know of and believe in a world of real ghosts, angels, demons, and fairies, but their entertainment focuses on comedy, tragedy, and moral tales, so they may do risky things that no modern horror movie fan would consider.
- *Earth, 1950s, basic monster awareness, denied monster reality, ubiquitous horror popularity.* Popular culture is a strange mix of 3D movies, *I Love Lucy*, and rock and roll. People know about ghosts, vampires, Frankenstein, and zombies but also believe those monsters are fictional, and celebrating Halloween is as big as Christmas.
- *The moon, near future, informed monster awareness, suspected reality, fringe popularity.* Colonists on a lunar base can easily name a half-dozen horror monsters (ghosts, vampires, werewolves, and so on) and think that ghosts are probably real, but most people couldn't tell you if silver bullets are better against werewolves or mummies.

If your setting is based on or inspired by existing material, and the players knowing that wouldn't spoil anything for them, you can name-drop that material as part of your summary. For example, you might say that your game is "the 1930s of *The Untouchables*, and prohibition is popular because everyone knows demons are real and can easily possess intoxicated people." Or "the 1980s of *Stranger Things*, and most people know that dangerous extradimensional monsters are real." Or "*Snow Crash*, and real ghosts are known to creep into the digital Metaverse." Furthermore, if it wouldn't spoil the game for them, you could direct your players to take a look at that inspirational material as part of their preparations for the game.

Of course, the players will learn more specific details as they play, and part of the fun of a horror setting is encountering *unexpected* things. You get to see the players realize what creepy things are in store for them, and the players get to roleplay their characters' reactions to familiar tropes and unique ideas.

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Horror is a strange genre because we *want* to feel uneasy or scared, but that doesn't give blanket permission for someone to poke around in all the corners of our mind and find things that disturb us. We're allowed to open the door to fear about one topic but keep the doors to other topics closed. In other words, you're allowing yourself to be scared, but only by things you've consented to be scared about. The *Cypher System Rulebook* describes this as "good uncomfortable," which is something that makes you squirm in your seat in a great horror movie, and "bad uncomfortable," which is something that actually makes you feel nauseated, unsafe, or offended. Being scared can be fun, but being sickened isn't.

You might be perfectly comfortable with horror stories about ghosts but feel uncomfortable when the antagonist is a demon. You might enjoy a scary movie with alien body-snatchers but draw the line at a movie about being buried alive. You might be fine with an NPC threatening to kill a character, but not with that same NPC threatening to torture a character. You might like being scared by spiders, but not by dogs. You might enjoy a movie where demons drag people to hell, but not one where scientists perform painful experiments on animals.

And all of that is completely fair.

In addition to the information in the Consent in Games PDF, here are some important things to remember when dealing with consent issues in a horror game.

THE HORROR GAME CONSENT CHECKLIST

The GM should use the Horror Game Consent Checklist when planning a horror game. This list has additional entries for many common horror topics discussed in this book. As with the general checklist in the Consent in Games PDF, the GM prints or photocopies one for each player and themselves, and each player fills out their own form and returns it to the GM.

Note that for the Movie Rating entry, a G-rated game might be spooky like an episode of Scooby-Doo. A PG rating might be more creepy than horrific, with ghosts and spooky noises but not axe-wielding maniacs. An R or NC-17 rating usually means a lot of profanity, gore, and realistic violence.

As a reminder, the GM doesn't have to use all of the group's opt-in consent topics. If the GM's intent was to run a game with body horror, creepy dolls, and claustrophobia, it doesn't matter that the group also opted in for demons and snakes—the GM doesn't have to include demons and snakes in the game. In fact, if the players know that some things are on the group's consent list, those might be good misleads that

This chapter is essential reading for GMs and players who want to have a horror game.

Before reading this chapter, read the free Consent in Games *PDF at myMCG.info/consent*

Horror Game Consent Checklist, page 222

The website DoesTheDogDie.com was founded so people could avoid movies where a dog character gets killed. It has since expanded to include other topics.

Body horror, page 40

Killer toys, page 62

Misleads, page 31

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Your Best Game Ever *is a book from Monte Cook Games, crammed full of suggestions for enhancing your RPG experience at the table and away from it, no matter what sort of game you're playing or what game system you're using.*

Of course, if you have issues yourself, it's your responsibility to let the group know. You don't have to give details or say more than you wish, but it's only fair that you reveal what your red flags are. Most people will give you the respect and consideration you are due, but you have to let them know what your parameters are, and what your needs are.

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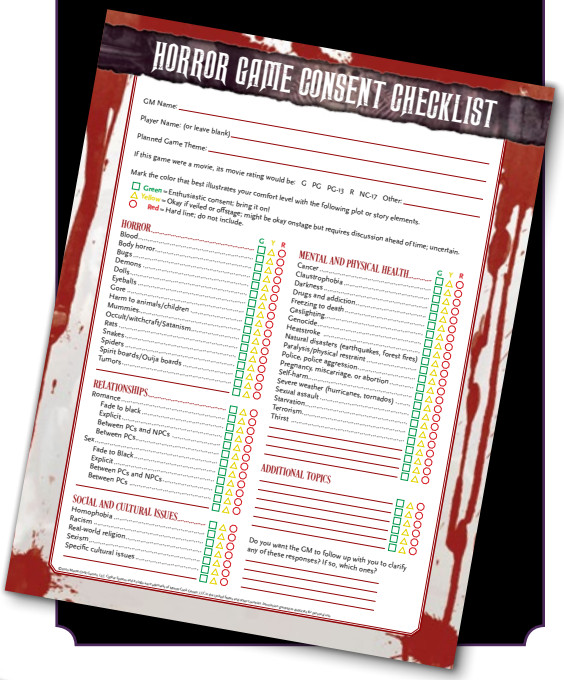
temporarily send their investigations in the wrong direction. For example, the GM might mention a news story about black-robed people spotted in a park at midnight (they're actually student filmmakers) and a giant snake hiding in a slummy apartment building (just an escaped pet), neither of which has to do with the plot of evil dolls transforming people into hollow monstrous shapes that the dolls will wear like body armor.

IMPORTANT THINGS ABOUT CONSENT

- You decide what's safe for you.
- The default answer is "no."
- It doesn't matter why consent wasn't given.
- Nobody has to to explain why they're not consenting.
- There may not be a reason why they're not consenting.
- There's a spectrum of consent for each topic.
- It's not up for debate.
- They can always change their mind about what they are or aren't consenting to.
- Anyone is allowed to leave an uncomfortable situation at any time.



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Much of the framework of your horror setting covers the Who, What, When, and Where of the Five W questions. Figuring out the game's plot—the events in the story and how the PCs drive them—is the point of the Why question and the suddenly-not-so-optional How question:

- Why is the horror happening?
- How can the PCs interact with and eliminate this threat?

WHY: FINDING THE PLOT

Although a horror plot can be as convoluted as a murder mystery, at its core the answer to the Why question is usually something simple like "a demon is evil," "a ghost wants vengeance," "a dangerous monster is hungry," "someone did a bad thing," or "invaders are trying to take over." The nuance of the answer in the context of the other W questions gives you more precise information about the plot. The demon is possessing someone—who and why? The ghost is angry—what caused that? The monster—why is it in the area, and what is it hungry for? The bad thing—who did it, and what was it? The invaders—where are they from, and what do they want?

The end of this chapter has more than forty horror plot ideas you can start with.

HOW: INVOLVING THE PCS

Because horror plots are generally about dealing with a threat to the PCs or to the entire world, it's not too difficult to steer the players in the direction of the plot and get them to engage with it. In a fantasy game, the PCs may debate whether they want to skip town instead of helping some peasants deal with orc raiders. In a sci fi game, the spacefaring PCs may opt to deliver high-profit luxury goods instead of answering a distress call from an impoverished colony town. But in a horror game, the PCs are often forced into a bad situation or are the only ones who can stop the threat. Examples of ways to involve the PCs include the following.

- **They're trapped.** They might be physically trapped (they're confined to a spaceship with an alien on the loose), geographically trapped (their car broke down near a cannibal family, and trying to walk through the badlands is certain death), or supernaturally trapped (the demon always kills the heir of the Kilmeade family on their thirty-third birthday, no matter where the heir is).
- **They're invested in the situation.** The investment might be physical (a PC has the deed to a haunted house), financial (the malevolent AI has locked all of the PCs' bank accounts), or emotional (the

This chapter is intended for GMs. Players who read it might spoil some of the fear, fun, and surprise of playing in a horror game.

Five W Questions, page 12

If you're running a one-shot scenario, it's even easier to have the PCs already involved and committed to the situation in the opening scene. Horror one-shots, page 30.

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vampire killed their parents, and it's time to avenge their deaths).

- **It's their job.** Exorcists, ghost hunters, and black ops agents tend to fit this category.
- **They're the only ones qualified.** This might be a situation where PCs known for a very specialized line of work have to come out of retirement for one last contract.
- **They're the only ones *available*.**

If these seem a bit like railroading the PCs, that's okay. Most horror stories are about regular people who want nothing to do with demons, ghosts, or monsters and are just trying to get to safety.

Memorable Horror Moment: *The flashback scenes in* Pet Sematary *with Rachel's sister Zelda.*

SAMPLE HORROR PLOTS

Here are a bunch of horror plots that you can use as a starting point for your game.

- A book narrates current events and prophesies things to come.
- A close friend or relative thinks they're losing their mind. They may actually be a werewolf.
- A creature uses a friendly shape to tempt or hunt people, but it can maintain the façade for only a short time before its true, horrific nature starts to become apparent.
- A friend, relative, or pet is gone for a while and comes back different.
- A handful of people can see that Earth has been infiltrated by alien creatures.
- A haunting coincides with the birth of a child.
- A killer uses the internet to follow and harass their next intended victim.
- A messiah-like figure is not who or what they claim to be.
- A person becomes deranged and starts to undermine all the good works of their old enemies.
- A person can send out their skin as an independent animate creature, which hunts and infects others by touch.
- A person finds a strange door or hatch in a basement, backyard, or wilderness.
- A person goes missing in the woods.
- A person is sent pictures of themselves in situations that they don't remember happening.
- A person presumed dead years ago turns up, unaware that time has passed and looking the same age as when they vanished.
- A person turns into a doll but is still alive. Are they the monster or a victim?
- A virus causes uncontrolled skin growth, sealing over mouths, eyes, noses, or ears, depending on individual immune responses.
- An exploratory spaceship lands on an alternate Earth that has one major difference from the crew's homeworld.
- An insane doctor performs experimental surgeries on patients without their permission.
- An odd person stares intensely at the PCs and starts to show up wherever they are.
- Animals develop a hostile collective intelligence and are as smart as humans when they work in groups.
- Children in a small town start to take on the physical traits of various animals.
- Creatures try to lure people into vans, sewers, or creepy alleys, but they quickly vanish and leave no signs of their presence.
- Cultists worship and protect a gigantic animal (such as a spider or snake) they believe is an avatar of their god.

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- Disturbing figures begin appearing in peoples' dreams and nightmares, and eventually in reality as well. Are they hallucinations from sleep deprivation or psychic entities gaining power over their victims?
- Dozens of people are mind-swapped into the bodies of random strangers.
- Electronics act erratically in the presence of invisible hostile creatures.
- Everyone except a handful of people has been replaced by exact duplicates.
- Ghosts on a battlefield reappear once a year to reenact their battle, but this time something is different.
- Laughter and screams can be heard coming from underground, even when standing on basement floors, city streets, or solid rock.
- Monsters use the cover of Halloween to openly hunt in their true shapes.
- New technology allows the regrowing of lost or damaged limbs, but there is a side effect to the process.
- Objects and people from twisted parallel realities start to bleed into our own. Then things from our dimension begin to disappear.
- People are convinced that the PCs are the actual monsters.
- People wake up inside coffins. Were they buried alive? Are they the arisen dead?
- Pranksters pretend to be monsters in order to scare people, but then something starts killing them.
- Silhouettes of strange things are seen lurking in the clouds.
- Something attacks a town for one week every generation as vengeance for an old slight.
- Something dangerous is traveling through the plumbing.
- Something frees ghosts en masse from the afterlife, and the evil ones latch on to anything in the mortal world they can because they know what horrors await them on the other side.
- Supernatural creatures attack just as human survivors are starting to recover from a worldwide plague.
- The minds of a demon and a human are linked so they can see out of each other's eyes. The human sees the demon's murders, and the demon is slowly figuring out where the spying human is.

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This chapter is a collection of advice for players and GMs planning for a horror game. Some margin callouts may point to chapters that contain spoilers for players.

Advice for Players

Playing in a horror RPG isn't quite like other types of games where the GM describes the world and presents options, and the players react. Horror requires you (the player) to take a more active role in making sure that the mood the GM is building doesn't get broken by incidental distractions.

Arrange for noisy children to be away from the game area, preferably under the care of someone who isn't playing the game. Make sure needy pets are fed, walked, and otherwise not going to interrupt the game. Set your phones to silent and put them away so they don't interrupt the flow of the story. Time your breaks (for food or using the bathroom) when your character isn't active in a scene and the GM won't need to talk to you. Ask the GM if there are any extra preparations you should make just in case your character becomes incapacitated or killed—there may still be ways for you as a player to remain involved in the action, such as by controlling an NPC or an alternative PC, or if the GM is using the Ghostly Helpers optional rule that lets you play your dead character's cyphers to help other players.

Ghostly Helpers, page 87

Keep the off-topic side chatter to a minimum so the player in the spotlight can focus their imagination on the clues the GM is giving them. Resist the temptation to make jokes or funny comments that break the horrific tension of a scene. Even if your character is supposed to be the comic relief (and comedy has an important role in horror), there are only certain times when that's appropriate for the game, and you should learn to understand when the story is ready for it.

Know what your character is capable of, and know the rules well enough to minimize looking things up in a book. Listen carefully to descriptions so the GM doesn't have to repeat themselves. Take good notes about what your character learns.

Do whatever you can to put yourself in the mental space of your character. Make yourself comfortable there, comfortable enough that you can react to unexpected events in the game as your character would, without being embarrassed—it's a roleplaying game, and it's good to be swept up in your role.

Horror gaming is much more of a cooperative performance than non-horror gaming, and it requires your extra attention to truly make it successful. In this way, you're creating an environment where the entire group can feel the fear energy and ride it like a precision automobile.

Enhancing the Mood

This section gives tips for GMs about enhancing and maintaining a spooky, scary, or eerie atmosphere for a horror game.

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Players normally don't have the same level of attachment to a brand-new character that they do to one they've been playing a while. Like an actor in the first few episodes of a new television show, they need time to find their footing in the character and get a feel for their wants and fears. If that new character is suddenly thrust into a horrific situation, often the player isn't ready to deal with the emotional consequences of it; what you end up with is the player reacting as a generic character (perhaps their default character persona) instead of that specific character.

If the GM can give the players time to experience the lives of those characters under normal circumstances, it helps bring the characters to life in their minds, and it makes the transition to a horror situation scary and in-character. For some players, this might take only fifteen minutes, but some would rather have an hour or even an entire session of playing their character in "normal life" before they're ready to face fear. For a one-shot game, it's usually not possible to give them that much time, but you can dole out little bits of normality at the start of the session (perhaps with an in-character meet and greet), in between intense scenes when the characters have a moment to recover from a fright, and before the game by letting the players develop a page of background for their character and share it with the other players who know that PC.

The environment where you're playing can add to the mood of the game, reinforcing the mental state that the players are trying to balance as they shift between imagining what their characters see and interacting with the GM and players at the table with them.

Memorable Horror Moment: *The shower scene from* Psycho.

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Some games are so lethal that the significance of death is diminished due to its frequency. In games like these, it can be a badge of honor to survive six sessions with the same character because death is so common.

These kinds of games absolutely require that the group has a policy for how to handle death, new characters, and getting them in quickly. The latter issue can be accomplished either by using a system where character creation takes only a few minutes or by having each player create multiple PCs so they have a fill-in or two (or five) ready to go.

Keep in mind that maintaining story continuity is difficult in these kinds of games. If no one has survived more than five sessions, that means no current character even knows what happened six sessions ago.

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Proper lighting, such as flashlights or candles (use LED flickering candles and torch sconces if the game area is a fire hazard), can totally change the mood of a game, especially if the group normally plays in a brightly lit space. A small lamp with differently colored bulbs can change the look and feel of the table with a couple of clicks—green for a forest or sewer encounter, blue for water and icy environments, or red for lava and combat (and mixing them in different combinations creates yellow, cyan, or violet). If playing in near-darkness with flashlights, colored lenses (or a flashlight with multiple colored lenses built in) can create dramatic spot effects for narration. Decorations, props, custom character sheets, special dice, and other physical cues in the gaming space remind the players that they're participating in a horror game. Try playing in a different space, changing the seat order, or surrounding the table with a curtain to make the game feel different than a typical session.

Before using scented candles, be sure they are allowed in your gaming space and that none of the people present have any allergies or chemical sensitivities.

Practice facial expressions in a mirror like an actor; when you speak as the vampire, wear your haughty vampire face, and when you talk as the mad henchman, let the players see it in your eyes and hear it in your voice. If you know any actors or voice actors, see if they'll record in-character monologues for you to play back on your phone—lost voices calling out in the woods, creepy messages left in PC inboxes, dispassionate computers resisting any attempts to shut down the self-destruct protocol, and so on. Use small scented candles to make the area smell like forest, water, or exotic plants. By using many subtle touches, some of which are ongoing or happen without your direct attention, you build up an overlapping aura that bolsters the immersion of playing in the game (and using multiple small gestures means that if you forget one, it doesn't subtract much from the total performance).

Surprise props that directly augment your performance can startle the players in ways that a verbal description can't. "Witch finger" gloves, fake fingertips (tentacles, zombie claws, and so on), or temporary-adhesive nails are easy to

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put on under the table, allowing you to reveal them when you point or swipe at a player when a monster attacks.

Blood and gore can create a visceral fear reaction, but they make less of a horrific impression as a verbal description than their actual appearance would horrify or disgust a PC. Instead, rely on unexpected events that startle the PC and player, and use overt gore when it's out of context for the current scene (such as a grocery store or quiet city sidewalk). Costume and party stores sell gloves and sleeves that look like they're covered in blood or are bare muscle without any skin, and slipping on one of those can help shock a player who otherwise might not react to a description of a bloody or flayed hand reaching toward their PC.

Unless you're lucky enough to have art or photos that look exactly like what you want the characters to see, you'll need to describe how things look in the game world. In a film or television show, the visual appearances of things are created by the costume designer, set designer, and cinematographer. As the GM of a roleplaying game, you guide the players' imaginations using your words, and what you say should be as accurate and evocative as possible so they have the proper scaffolding in their heads to hang their internal fear imagery upon. One way to learn to do this is to emulate the descriptions used in horror that you like. For visual media like television, film, and comics, check the novelization of the story for text descriptions of scenes, and find online reviews and analysis of art and video by fans and experts to see what they notice and interpret about the visuals.

The goal of a horror game is to scare the players. Perhaps write "SCARE THEM" on a note card and use it as a bookmark or clip it to your GM screen so you remember to make the game scary.

Investing in NPCs with Emotional Connections

In a horror game, it's common for characters to die. Sometimes PCs die. NPCs *often* die. The GM might even treat certain NPCs as expendable to set the scene for how dangerous the situation is without removing a PC (and player) from the game. However, if the GM isn't invested in the NPCs, the players aren't likely to be, either. The GM needs to build some empathy hooks in each NPC—things that make the NPC likeable, good to have around in a crisis, or at least not an irredeemable dirtbag, enough that the players treat them more like real people.

Some NPCs have built-in empathy hooks and don't need much embellishment to make the players develop an emotional connection with them. A loyal and friendly dog is pretty much guaranteed to get on players' good sides, especially if the dog makes itself useful early on by finding food or barking when something dangerous approaches. Children are also easy for PCs to like, especially kids that are quietly scared (not crying or attracting attention to the group) and in need of a temporary guardian.

The GM can easily create empathy hooks between NPCs and PCs by giving them positively connected backstories. The cantankerous old man NPC has a soft spot for his grandkid (one of the PCs). The annoying lawyer is the spouse of a PC's friend (who is currently separated from the group). The excitable deputy NPC has always looked up to a

The horror genres in chapter 6 provide many specific suggestions for dressing up the gaming area to suit the kind of story you're making.

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The Character Posse horror module is another way to get players invested in the fates of minor characters. Character Posse, page 85.

(more successful and slightly older) PC. One way the GM can cement this sort of bond is to give the player character 1 XP when the associated NPC is introduced to the session, almost like a half-strength GM intrusion (this is especially effective for one-shot games if the PCs start with 0 XP and the NPC is brought in early).

The GM should try to give most NPCs at least one thing that'll provoke a twinge of empathy in the players. It doesn't have to make up for the rest of their actions or attitude, but it makes them less cartoonishly one-dimensional. The snooty banker rehabilitates abused dogs. The vapid fashion model does charity work for a children's hospital. The rude barista teaches ballroom dancing at a nursing home. The obnoxious football coach is devoted to his young daughters.

It's okay to have a few characters that are simply obnoxious so the players are happy to see them go. Part of enjoying a horror game with a large cast of characters is knowing that some people will get their just desserts for not being team players. But if most NPCs seem like they're worth saving, it makes the players work harder to keep everyone alive, and there's a greater emotional impact when inevitably a character has to die.

Creating Narrative Tension with Highs and Lows

The natural flow for a story, even in horror, is to alternate the mood of each scene. There's a time of peace and safety, and then that feeling is broken by something frightening. The characters escape and have a moment to rest and crack a joke, then the intensity increases again as they seek out a missing friend or get ambushed by the monster that has

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been following them. These moments (also called "beats") let the players rest their positive and emotional reactions so the next time they need to be relieved or afraid, their energy is at full strength and the GM can get a great reaction out of them. If the entire session is just one horrific encounter after another, the players will experience emotional fatigue and the later parts of the session won't be as fun, scary, or rewarding.

The GM can plan for this up/down cycle by figuring out whether a scene (in an RPG, this is usually one encounter) is supposed to increase or decrease tension, and clearly mark that in the notes for that session. By having some flexibility in the order that encounters happen, the GM can plan a really intense encounter, follow it with a scene or event that calms things down a bit, then follow that one with another horrific encounter. This might mean altering what's in the next room or over the next hill so the PCs can keep to the beat structure.

- Examples of very intense encounters include the first time the PCs find a dead body, a PC is hit by a trap or other effect that moves them down the damage track, or the group has a direct confrontation that leads to combat.
- Mildly intense encounters might be hearing strange noises, finding *another* dead body (when the PCs already know people are being killed), or a brief combat that is more startling than life-threatening.
- Mildly calm encounters can be an environmental change that makes their situation better (such as sunrise in a vampire scenario or finding a defensible spot in a zombie apocalypse), finding a clue toward a long-term solution to their situation (such as a map to a sanctuary), or even something as simple as giving them time to walk, talk, and joke for a little while without being frightened or disturbed.
- Examples of very calm encounters are giving the PCs time to rest for a few hours, finding or reuniting with an ally, or discovering useful equipment that makes them feel safer (such as weapons or a vehicle).

The calm beats don't have to reset the intensity back down to zero; ideally, tension keeps increasing overall in each of the intense beats until the final encounter is the most frightening one of the entire session. The most versatile tool for managing this is a GM intrusion, which increases the intensity of a scene. For example, the GM can elevate a calm beat into an intense beat by having monsters ambush the PCs, or amplify a mildly or very intense encounter with the arrival of enemy reinforcements or a PC dropping a weapon. A very calm beat can turn into a mildly calm beat by adding a drawback to the positive situation, such as finding a lost ally who now has a hurt leg and will slow everyone down, or discovering that the getaway vehicle is very noisy and almost out of gas.

The Horror Mode game mechanic is another tool for increasing and decreasing the tension. Calm beats are a good time to reset the intrusion range back to normal. *Horror Mode, page 89.*

Alternating high and low tension is kind of like rotating among your muscle groups at the gym every day: leg day, arm day, chest day, and so on. If you did leg day twice in a row, you'd be weak and sore.

SHOW, DON'T TELL

A common technique used in fiction writing is "Show, don't tell." Don't tell the reader something through exposition, summary, and simple description; instead, use action, thoughts, senses, and feelings to make them understand the story and draw their own conclusions. Horror games

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also benefit from this technique. Here are some examples:

Tell: The moor at night looks spooky.
Show: The mist slowly rolls its way across the moor, mysterious lights flickering within it like the eyes of strange beasts.

There are entire books and writer's workshops about the "Show, don't tell" technique. Here you're getting only a brief summary as it relates to horror.

Tell: The house is old and decrepit.
Show: The weight of years presses heavily upon the house, turning its once-straight lines into the painful sway of an old man's back.

Tell: The werewolf has bad breath.
Show: The beast's hot breath is heavy with meat and blood, its panting tongue lolling madly over its yellow teeth.

Of course, unlike when writing a novel, the GM doesn't have the opportunity to pore over everything that's said and make sure it fits this method, but having an appropriate description for important environments, locations, and creatures helps maintain the mood and keep the players mentally and emotionally invested in what's happening.

Many published adventures have "read-aloud text" that describes encounter areas, but because the GM's way of speaking is probably very different than the author's way of writing, this often results in the GM switching from *speaking with* the players to *reading at* them, with a noticeable difference in tone and intensity. To avoid falling into this trap when describing things in the game, the GM should prepare and rehearse this material in advance (rewriting it to suit their speaking style if necessary) and keep the actual descriptive text to just a sentence or two so it remains part of the ongoing story instead of a speech pasted into the story.

Horror Fatigue

Most people run horror games as one-shots or perhaps as a short story arc that takes a few sessions to complete. A horror game "marathon" (when you're trying to fit a dozen hours of gaming in one weekend) is hard to do, as is getting a regular group of people together for an ongoing horror campaign. It's difficult to maintain the cycle of raising and lowering tension without allowing players to become fatigued by too much horror or allowing the fear level to drop to zero (effectively resetting the situation to its starting point). Having some players be unavailable for certain sessions means that they entirely miss out on the escalating progression of terror, so not all players are having a comparable experience. Continually having to find new ways to frighten the PCs can also be wearying for a GM.

That's not to say that some groups aren't able to enjoy or sustain long-term horror campaigns. These groups have learned how to handle the rise and fall of narrative tension in the campaign, perhaps even having entire sessions go by without any horrific events. The break between sessions rather than scenes allows the PCs to have normal lives and lets the players work on character development that gets them more emotionally invested in those characters and the NPCs around them.

If you're attempting a longer horror campaign, establishing and maintaining the atmosphere from session to session is much more of a group effort. The

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GM needs to plan farther ahead to manage the long-term narrative beats, and the players need to take an active role in carrying the story arcs through the rising and falling tension. If you're in a long-term horror game and find that the energy is tapering off, don't be disheartened, and remember that it's always okay to put a campaign on hold for a while (and play something else for a few sessions) or wrap it up early, especially if that means everyone ends with good (although perhaps tragic) memories of the campaign story.

MISLEADS

Misleads (also known as red herrings) are things introduced to a story that are meant to distract characters from something relevant or important. Players use distractions all the time to keep villains and monsters away from something, and in horror it's common for a word, phrase, song, smell, image, or even a character to serve as a distraction for the PCs. The point of a mislead is to confuse and delay the PCs so they don't immediately discover the true source of horror in the scenario; this allows the tension to rise and fall as it builds toward the final conflict with the actual antagonist. Sometimes a red herring is a clue to read or a motif of something important in the scenario; in these cases, it is sometimes used as a coda after the final conflict to suggest that the true villain isn't really dead and gone.

For example, when a child goes missing in the woods, townsfolk tell the PCs about a mean old hermit living in a shack, which makes the PCs think the hermit kidnapped the child, distracting them from clues that actually point to a supernatural child-eating creature. While the PCs question the old man (who is very confrontational and wants them off his land, which makes the characters even more suspicious), the monster eats another child.

The following are some examples of red herrings in horror. Players should keep in mind that just because something is listed here doesn't mean it's automatically a mislead—sometimes the sound of a chainsaw in the darkness really does mean there's a maniac with a chainsaw out to kill you!

Animal Noises: Bats, cicadas, owls, and wolves are all well-known animals that make creepy noises associated with horror. If the PCs are near a wilderness area and there's any sort of unusual or supernatural activity going on, animal sounds add to the tension and create an association in their minds that the

In a survival or escape adventure, the PCs are somewhere they probably don't want to be, and they need to survive and get back home. A format that doesn't get used enough is the "marooned" adventure, where the PCs get stuck on an island, crash on an alien planet, or just get isolated far from civilization and have to find a way to survive. Getting food, shelter, and safety suddenly become all-important, and only after that can they think about eventually finding a way home.

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noises and their state of alarm are directly related.

Chainsaws: Any time there are rumors of a masked killer on the loose is a good time for the GM to throw in a nearby NPC using a chainsaw or other noisy power tool. It makes the players suspect that the killer uses a chainsaw, or even that the NPC they hear is the killer trying to hide in plain sight. The truth is that chainsaws are common tools, especially in forested areas, and it's not that unusual to hear someone using one on an otherwise quiet day. Of course, the GM can also subvert this red herring by actually having the killer use a chainsaw, or confuse things further with an escaped parrot that likes imitating the sound of a chainsaw.

Memorable Horror Moment: *The twilight scene in* Jaws *when the first swimmer gets attacked.*

Creepy Hermits: Some people are antisocial and really go out of their way to avoid other people. In some remote communities, it's not unheard of for people to live in isolation for months at a time, catching and growing their own food and coming into town only for bullets, flour, and fuel. Add in poor hygiene and limited dental care, and these grumpy folks end up the target of cruel rumors about murdering their families or practicing witchcraft. Of course, they're not too happy when a group of belligerent strangers shows up at their door with a bunch of nosy questions, but that's also exactly how a person with a dark secret would react.

Images: Pictures, drawings, and photographs cause PCs to jump to all kinds of conclusions. A mysterious symbol on a barn door might be an old rune against bad weather or the secret mark of a blood cult. An old photo might show a young man who looks exactly like someone still living in town, hinting that they're immortal. Some images are so common that it's hard to say if they're meant to mislead or not—a drawing of a clown in a book

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Lots of people use horror games as one-shots or very short campaigns, but some groups have long-running horror campaigns. It's challenging to constantly come up with things to terrify the same group of characters session after session.

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might refer to an extradimensional spider demon that takes the form of a clown, or it might just be there because clowns are everyday images.

Songs: Musical cues (such as the distinct piano theme from *Halloween* or the bells from the theme to *The Exorcist*) add to the atmosphere of a horror film for the viewing audience, and it's possible to have in-world songs or music be a clue for the PCs. For example, in the movie *Fallen*, a certain Rolling Stones song means the villain is nearby, and various classic rock and roll songs serve the same purpose in *Christine*. The GM can play these musical cues quietly as part of the background atmosphere of the session, only revealing later their connection to the horror with an overt use of that music when the monster is present.

Smells: It's easy to associate the smells of rot and death with ghouls, ghosts, and vampires, and for PCs to follow those scents like a path to the end of the scenario. But pleasant smells can be misleads. For example, mummies can smell like rare spices (but so do fields of plants those spices are made from), and flowers might indicate the presence of a "black widow" ghost or a weird demon prince who happens to smell like lavender, causing the PCs to chase down florists in search of infernal corruption.

House Noises: It's very common for older homes to make noises as the walls and supports expand and contract from the day's warmth and the night's chill. These sounds might include stairs creaking, mysterious knocking at doors and windows, or moans and sighs as boards slowly grind against each other. When combined with wind whistling past ragged shingles and tree branches scratching on the roof, the houses can sound like they're haunted. The PCs investigating these noises for supernatural causes gives actual demons and ghosts more time to worm their way into innocent minds and bodies, as does dismissing authentic haunting sounds as the house "settling."

Pregnancy: This is often a very polarizing topic in RPGs, and just mentioning that an NPC is pregnant can cause strong reactions in the players. Of course, the players and PCs probably encounter pregnant people all the time in civilized areas, but as soon as you specifically note that a particular NPC is pregnant, it becomes significant to the players, and they wonder why that fact is worth mentioning and if the pregnancy has any relevance to the character's importance. Players tend to either get very protective of that character or become very paranoid about the pregnancy (usually along the lines of "Are they going to give birth to an evil monster that will destroy the world?").

Pregnancy is a sensitive consent topic. For some people, worrying that there might be a threat to the pregnancy is distracting and stressful. Consent, page 19.

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Adding Horror to Your Existing Campaign

Ask an old-school gamer about the Ravenloft setting for Dungeons & Dragons, and how everyone feared the mists.

Just because you're interested in trying horror doesn't mean you have to set aside your regular campaign and PCs. You can add horror elements to your existing game, perhaps for a special one-shot session or a multisession story arc, or you can remain in the horror story indefinitely until the characters find a way to escape back to their normal situation.

In many ways, a side trek into horror for an ongoing campaign is like a Halloween episode of a TV show where weird things start to happen but everything wraps up and goes back to normal at the end of the hour. Maybe some aspect of it becomes part of the story's continuity, strange things that can't be explained are ignored and forgotten, and normal life goes on for the characters.

Even if something really untoward happens, the GM can revert some or all of it at the end of the session, even if characters die. Perhaps it was a dream, a training exercise with remote-piloted clone bodies, a drug-induced shared hallucination fabricated by the enemies of the PCs, a time-space anomaly, alien mind-control experiments, or the proximity of a singing demon lord. Depending on the nature of the campaign, reversing the tragic events of the horror session might be an adventure on its own (such as sifting through alternate timelines for still-living versions of dead PCs, finding a time travel artifact, or using a resurrection spell).

Repeat Performance

One of the tropes of horror (especially horror movies) is a sequel. The source material the GM uses to inspire a particular session might be the first of many stories in that setting, with the PCs taking the active role. The GM can run a follow-up game that takes place minutes, weeks, or years after the events in the original story, where the PCs have to deal with the consequences of the previous characters' successes and failures.

If the GM has already run characters through the scenario, it's okay to send another group of PCs through it (even if the current players were participants in that previous run) to clean up the mess created by the first group, or to find any survivors (or bodies) that were left behind. Maybe the newest PCs have information about what happened there or can tap into security camera footage or personal video logs to get a better sense

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of past events—justifying what bits of meta-knowledge the players can't let go of. This scenario could become an annual tradition for the group (perhaps with rotating GMs) or something the GM runs every year at a favorite game convention.

Death in a Horror Game

One of the common fears that horror relies on is the fear of death, and the genre pushes that button by frequently killing off characters, especially in tragic, undeserved, and shocking ways. If you're playing in a horror game, you should feel there's a significant risk of your character dying, or even *all* of the characters dying. In some horror scenarios, there are no winning choices and the characters may not realize there is no hope of survival, but they stubbornly won't let themselves give up. It's also possible to have a horror scenario where there are no survivors, and the goal is to last as long as possible or achieve an ulterior motive, like participating in a suicide mission to destroy an alien mothership.

If you're GMing a horror game, you need to be brutal and ruthless—especially so if you normally keep things on the safe side for PCs. In horror, there's no point in pulling punches; you want the PCs to be afraid that they'll die, and you want the players to be taking extreme measures to make sure their character—or another character they care about more than their own PC—doesn't die. (Horror modules like Character Posse and Ghostly Helpers give players more opportunities to stay active in the game once their character is no longer active in the scenario.)

GM intrusions are a weapon used early and often. PCs will drop their weapon just when they need it the most. They'll fall down and have to crawl. They'll be impaled. Or poisoned. Or lose a hand. They'll see their friends and allies drop dead from wounds and exhaustion. Some of them might live long enough to see their killer get away with no repercussions.

In horror, sometimes all the PCs die and the villain wins. Sometimes the villain dies and still wins. And sometimes the villain comes back.

If the setting is based on another story, such as a film or television episode, perhaps that is the original occurrence and the first RPG session is the second.

Character Posse, page 85

Ghostly Helpers, page 87

Memorable Horror Moment: *The scene in* The Fly *(1986) when Brundle demonstrates how flies eat food.*

Something that many GMs try to varying degrees of success is to have the PCs thrown in prison or captured by their enemies. Here's a word of warning, though: players absolutely hate to have their characters get captured. They hate to have their belongings stripped from them. The heroes being captured and having to escape is a well-worn trope in pulp stories and related fiction, but it's difficult to pull off with regularity in a roleplaying game. Player psychology seems to be that they'd rather see their character die than get captured. If this isn't true of your group, then by all means use the "escape from captivity" adventure and have fun with it. But, if possible, give your players a heads up as to what you're intending or you can unwittingly end up with a TPK (total party kill) as the characters go down fighting rather than allow themselves to be captured.

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This chapter is intended for GMs. Players who read it might spoil some of the fear, fun, and surprise of playing in a horror game.

This chapter takes a detailed look at more than twenty different horror genres. If you're planning on running a horror game featuring aliens, read that section of this chapter and loot it for ideas. Of course, as mentioned in chapter 7, horror is often a blend of multiple genres, so there's no reason why you shouldn't read the entire chapter and incorporate suggestions from other sections to create something weird that'll thrill and entertain your players.

Horror Mode, page 89

Chapter 7: Encyclopedia of Horror Mechanics, page 84

Understanding the Listings

Every genre is presented by name, followed by a standard template that includes the following categories.

Overview: A short summary of the horror genre.

Why Are They Scary?: An analysis of that genre, with specific points about how it relates to aspects of the human condition and why we find that topic to be frightening or horrifying.

Horror Modules: A list of optional game mechanics (found in chapter 7) to use with that horror genre. Examples of these concepts are the idea of the last survivor confronting the main villain after everyone else is dead, secret twists like the killer switching identities with a PC, or experiencing a horrific series of events and then jolting awake and realizing it was just a dream. Note that it's assumed that the GM will use the Horror Mode optional rule from time to time in any horror game, regardless of the genre.

There are many other horror genres, including urban gothic, psychological horror, and revenants, which overlap to some extent with one or more of the genres listed here.

Risks: Ways that running a game with this genre can go wrong, such as becoming too slapstick, being too predictable, or running into a player's real-life consent topic.

Making Them Scary in Your Game: Suggestions for how a GM can incorporate the important elements of this genre into the game, or ways to update the gaming space with props and music to accentuate the atmosphere.

Inspiration: A list of other media (books, television shows, and films) to explore for evoking the proper mood and details of the genre.

Callouts: Each section also has margin callouts with additional suggestions and thoughts about the genre, as well as several GM intrusions specifically for that type of horror game.

Genre Overview

This chapter discusses the following horror genres in detail:

Aliens: Creatures from another planet, usually very technologically advanced, with humans as their prey or obstacles to their real goals.

Body Horror: Uncontrollable transformations of the body into something inhuman and revolting.

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Child Protagonists: Aspects of horror made greater by letting near-helpless children lead the story.

Clowns: Death and mayhem in the guise of a friendly buffoon or an entertainer of children.

Comedy Horror: Mocking or spoofing common horror tropes but still keeping enough horrific elements that it isn't pure comedy.

Creepy Kids: The strangeness of children, amplified and given power, usually without ethics or restraint.

Dark Magic and the Occult: Supernatural powers used for selfish and evil purposes. Includes unholy rites, witches, prayers to evil gods, and cursed objects.

Degenerates: Breaking the taboo against eating flesh, its side effects, and the results of generations of inbreeding corruption.

Demons: Creatures from another realm or dimension who feast on human souls, inflict pain, and seek to unravel creation.

Doppelgangers: Copies of people who want to have their own existence and identities, perhaps by killing and replacing the originals.

Ghosts: The spirits of the dead, trapped on the fringes of the world of the living, seeking peace, redemption, or vengeance.

J-Horror and K-Horror: Japanese and Korean cultures presenting fresh and unusual interpretations of horror.

Killer Toys: Things meant to make children happy but that instead bring pain and death to anyone they can reach.

Lovecraftian: Ancient species and cosmic beings that human minds cannot experience without risking insanity.

Machines and Robots: Technology that has turned on its human creators. Unfeeling at best, angry and rebellious at worst.

Mummies: Bodies preserved and wrapped for a strange afterlife, guarded by curses and surrounded by treasures.

Science Gone Wrong: Discoveries that break the laws of physics as we know it, with horrific applications and consequences. Also known as mad science.

Simulacra: Artificial life, whether they're renegade clones, born of alchemy, or sewn together like Frankenstein's monster.

Slashers: Murderous maniacs who hunt down people (usually teenagers) and kill them in gruesome ways.

Survival Horror: When animals, the weather, or other aspects of the natural environment are the main threats to the survival of the PCs.

Vampires: Immortal creatures who need human blood to live. Stronger and faster than any human, they are often gifted with supernatural abilities like hypnosis and shapeshifting.

Werewolves: Humans that turn into beasts, usually under the light of a full moon, and create uncertainty and paranoia that leads to innocents being accused.

Zombies: The walking dead. Mindless, relentless, incredibly durable, and hungry for flesh or brains.

Warning: *There will be minor spoilers in the individual sections, particularly in the inspiration lists. As an obvious example, the inspiration list for ghosts includes* The Sixth Sense *(if for some reason you didn't know that ghosts are an important part of that film). So if you would consider it a spoiler to know ahead of time that a particular film or book has demons or ghosts or mummies in it, be careful to avoid looking at the inspiration lists.*

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Aliens are extraterrestrials—beings from another planet or another part of space. They may come to Earth seeking natural resources (minerals, rare metals, water, and so on), food, technology, or something incomprehensible to human minds, but their motives are exploitative at best and murderous at worst. Even aliens that seem to be friendly should be viewed with suspicion, as humanity has a long history of advanced civilizations conquering others in the guise of peace, religion, and charity. Space travel isn't cheap, and any aliens who come to Earth want something worth the cost of making the trip.

Aliens don't have to be active participants in coming to Earth; they might be seeds blown on the cosmic wind, a living weapon deployed by an ancient species, or a parasite accidentally brought back by an infected astronaut.

Alien GM intrusion: *Hours or days after an alien encounter, a mysterious man in black shows up to threaten a character into keeping silent about it.*

Man in Black, page 281

WHY ARE THEY SCARY?

Aliens are proof that life exists outside of Earth. That might initially seem positive and wondrous until you realize that existence for most living things on Earth is short, cutthroat, and violent, and since aliens may have evolved under more dangerous and brutal circumstances, there's a good chance that they are tougher, smarter, stronger, and more ruthless than anything on our world. They may have developed technology to travel between planets because they're more intelligent than humans or they had a thousand-year head start on their research, but the net result is that they are more advanced than us, which means humans are weak and primitive by comparison.

Alien GM intrusion: *The alien uses technology or a biological modification to produce a cypher that is perfect for its current situation.*

Alien GM intrusion: *More aliens arrive to help, perhaps called by an emergency transmission or birthed out of the first alien's own body.*

Alien GM intrusion: *A human governmental operative or a civilian "expert" on alien conspiracy theories tries to intimidate, befriend, or negotiate with the aliens, and is killed or abducted for their hubris.*

HORROR MODULES

- Hysteria
- Instant Panic
- Poor Choices
- Secret Twist (allied with the aliens)
- Shock
- Unease

RISKS

Aliens in horror are often depicted as naked and feral, whereas in science fiction they usually have clothing (or uniforms), manufactured weapons, and a culture. By presenting aliens as brutish, uncivilized things, it relegates them to being just "monsters," which is fine on one level (*Alien* and *The Thing* do this, and they're two of the best horror movies ever made) but doesn't bring the additional horror factor that the alien has a homeworld and what the PCs are encountering is merely first contact.

MAKING ALIENS SCARY IN YOUR GAME

Alien biology doesn't have to work like Earth biology at all. They might have acid for blood, breathe benzene instead of oxygen (meaning they need respirators on our planet, but making their atmosphere incredibly toxic for us), have micro-organs distributed throughout their bodies (instead of larger, vulnerable organs), see in the infrared spectrum or by using radio waves, hibernate for years when they get too cold or hot, reproduce

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by vomiting their genetic material on suitable biomatter, and so on. They may be psychic entities or energy beings (like the killing white light). Pick something strange, make it a key factor in the story, and use it to surprise and terrify the PCs.

Poisons, diseases, and anything other than brute physical force might affect aliens very differently than they do us. It's a trope that aliens are vulnerable to a common Earth substance like water or our bacteria, but it's just as likely that they'd have an unusual *positive* reaction to something mundane from Earth. Perhaps chlorophyll is a stimulant for them, so they're accidentally invigorated when they crash through a garden or slide across a lawn. Or maybe gasoline accelerates their healing, so trying to set them on fire just makes them stronger.

Decorate the gaming area with posters, props, and other images from your favorite alien horror sources. It's useful if some of these are false leads to make the players think they know what sort of aliens the PCs are dealing with.

If the aliens are intelligent enough to have a command structure, save higher-ranked (and more powerful) aliens for later encounters to add uncertainty and danger to the game. These lieutenants and leaders might be the same species, allied species with different forms and abilities, or augmented versions of the common aliens (the equivalent of superheroes among the aliens).

Have the aliens act dismissive of the PCs and all humans, as if humans were annoying or moderately dangerous but not a serious threat, like raccoons or seagulls on a college campus. If the PCs establish that they *are* dangerous, the aliens can shift to an eradication protocol and show the characters the full force of their power. Aliens with an internally combative hierarchy might let one of their own get killed by the PCs just to eliminate a rival and see what kind of opponents the characters are.

Figure out what the aliens want (water, babies, brains, food, technology, whatever—just make sure it's creepy) and be sure the PCs see them take it. This forces the PCs to choose between stopping the aliens or interfering with the harvesting process. If they make the aliens their primary target, the stolen resources are probably compromised or consumed, and if they make the resources the primary target, some of the aliens will get away and be able to acquire more.

Aliens often have aspects that cross over into other genres, such as body horror, robots, science gone wrong, and simulacra. These crossover elements can flavor the perception of the aliens, add to your options in scaring the players, or be false leads for the PCs to track down.

Killing white light, page 340

Hint to all aliens: If you're vulnerable to water, don't attack a planet with 70% of its surface covered in water and inhabited by water-based life forms.

Alien Inspiration

Alien *(1979 film) and* Aliens *(1986 film)*

Clay's Ark *(1984 Octavia Butler novel)*

Invasion of the Body Snatchers *(1978 film)*

The Mist *(1980 Stephen King novella; 2007 film)*

Signs *(2002 film)*

The Space Vampires *(1976 Colin Wilson novel)*

The Thing *(1982 film)*

The War of the Worlds *(1897 H. G. Wells novel; 1953 film)*

They Live *(1988 film)*

V *(1983 TV miniseries and franchise)*

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You can temporarily introduce body horror and then revert everything back to normal after a while, such as having a character wake from a horrific dream or hallucination to realize that they're fine.

Warning: *Before doing research on body horror films and fiction (including some of those on the inspiration list), know that these stories often have disturbing or violent sexual aspects.*

Body horror GM intrusion: *An afflicted character's altered body part makes an attack against them or someone else as a level 3 creature, then becomes passive again (attacking the body part harms the afflicted character).*

Body horror GM intrusion: *A character's affliction suddenly becomes larger or more advanced, permanently hindering one type of task (Might, Speed, or Intellect) or adding a bizarre side effect (like constantly leaking pus or mumbling to itself).*

Pregnancy, sex, and cancer are three potential body horror topics you need to be very careful about. Be absolutely sure your players are comfortable with you introducing those elements into your game, and doubly sure about mixing them with body horror.

Under normal circumstances, your body has a consistent shape and you're able to control what it does. Body horror takes you out of that comfort and familiarity by altering your form in unwanted and uncontrollable ways, such as slowly transforming into a giant fly, your flesh melting off and becoming a hostile organism, parasites visibly crawling around under your skin, or being surgically attached to another person.

WHY IS IT SCARY?

Your body is your own. It's the meat vehicle you've piloted for your entire conscious existence. Even as it grew and changed over time, it was still your body, and even the most radical changes—puberty, tattoos, pregnancy, surgery, piercings, and so on—were things that you knew other people had gone through and were in the normal realm of human experience. Body horror breaks that convention by having your body experience involuntary changes that are unwanted and uncontrollable.

It invokes fear and vulnerability because you've lost control of your own body (the physical equivalent of blacking out or being brainwashed) and because the changes are disturbing or disgusting (and would be so even if they happened to someone other than you). A person experiencing impossible symptoms might think they're going insane and that their perceptions of reality are skewed.

Body horror usually involves an ongoing transformation that gets worse over time, whether that means the alteration grows to encompass more of the person's body, it becomes more exaggerated, or its side effects become increasingly painful or harmful. Eventually the afflicted character comes to realize that these changes will end in their death. Depending on the nature of the transformation, the end might be something *worse* than death, such as hosting an alien parasite that controls you but still leaves you conscious, being imprisoned in a lab and experimented on, or losing just enough of your mind that you act like a beast but still remember you used to be human. This adds an element of urgency for the affected characters, either to find a cure or merely to halt their symptoms from progressing further.

HORROR MODULES

- Hallucination Reset
- Hysteria
- Instant Panic
- Last Survivor
- Madness
- Shock
- Unease

RISKS

It's really easy for body horror to veer into being too gory for the players' tastes, too violent or sexual, or (depending on the transformation) silly or absurd. Always take stock of how the players are reacting to the descriptions

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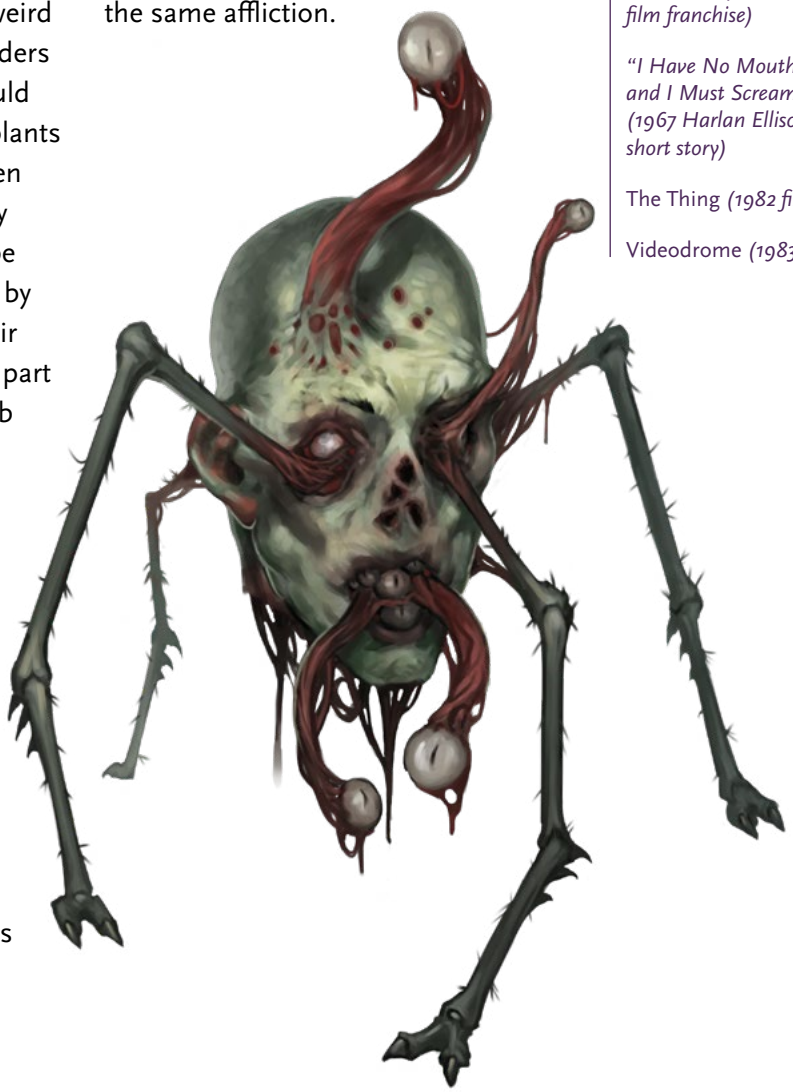
and events in the game, and give them a story beat to adjust and recover. Body horror creeps close to many sensitive consent topics, and it's good to remind your players about that so they are sure to think about what topics they're choosing to opt in on. It's your responsibility as the GM to keep a clear and safe distance from anything not on the consent list.

Making Body Horror Scary in Your Game

Body horror is inherently disturbing already, so just about anything you introduce with it will get a reaction from the players without much work. In fact, by knowing what things the players have approved on the consent list, you have a list of options for weird ways to mess with their PCs. If spiders are an approved topic, the PCs could encounter an alien spider that implants its eggs in human bodies, and when they hatch, the babies eat their way out. Or, even weirder, a PC could be possessed by a demon or infected by a virus that starts to transform their body into that of a spider—or just part of their body, so they have one limb that's starting to become a hostile spiderlike creature that attacks its host and eventually drops off as an independent entity. If cyborgs are an approved topic, the PCs can watch as their limbs become covered in circuitry or feel their emotions draining away as an alien technological virus converts their brains into enslaved computers.

Because body horror is about loss of control, have the character's altered body start to take action, either in addition to the PC's actions or by momentarily taking control of the PC's body. These might be instinctive actions like attacking a perceived threat or eating all of the available food, or they might represent the beginning of a separate intellect trying to take permanent control of its host's body and mind.

A social aspect of body horror is that the changes push the PC away from their own humanity and community. Have NPCs react with revulsion when they see what the PC has become. Make the other players have to roll for their characters to overcome their disgust before they can touch an afflicted PC, even to heal them or assist in a physical task like climbing over a wall. Make the PC feel alone, even if all of the PCs have the same affliction.



Consent, page 19

Body horror GM intrusion: *Something tears free of the afflicted character, becoming a level 3 creature that either runs away (perhaps to return later) or tries to afflict someone else.*

Body Horror Inspiration

Akira *(1988 film)*

Alien *(1979 film franchise)*

Annihilation *(2018 film)*

District 9 *(2009 film)*

The Fly *(1986 film)*

Frankenstein *(1818 Mary Shelley novel; 1931 film)*

Hellraiser *(1987 film franchise)*

"I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream" (1967 Harlan Ellison short story)

The Thing *(1982 film)*

Videodrome *(1983 film)*

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The Expanded Worlds *sourcebook for the Cypher System has pages of additional suggestions for playing as child PCs.*

You can make things a little easier for child PCs by giving them an NPC mentor who listens to and believes them, but can't solve the problem for them.

Child protagonist GM intrusion: *A group of bullies shows up and threatens the characters.*

Child protagonist GM intrusion: *One kid's transportation has a breakdown (bike gets a flat, subway pass has zero balance, and so on).*

Child Protagonist Inspiration

Coraline *(2002 Neil Gaiman novel; 2009 film)*

Five Nights at Freddy's 4 *(2015 videogame)*

Fran Bow *(2015 videogame)*

Goosebumps *(R. L. Stine book series)*

It *(1986 Stephen King novel; 1990 miniseries; 2017 film franchise)*

Little Monsters *(1989 film)*

Little Nightmares *(2017 videogame)*

Lord of the Flies *(1954 William Golding novel)*

The Lost Boys *(1987 film)*

The Monster Squad *(1987 film)*

Stranger Things *(2016 TV series)*

Horror doesn't care how old you are. A child can be abducted and dissected by aliens, strangled by a possessed doll, haunted by a murderer's ghost, or eaten by demons. Horror isn't about fairness, and making children the protagonists of a horror story shines a spotlight on how the random afflictions of chance may unfairly strike down the most innocent victims.

Why Are They Scary?

For adults, fear comes from practical, mundane things: loneliness, murder, poverty, terrorism, war. Children still live in a fantasy world inspired by books and cartoons, and their innocence and ignorance mean their fear is a long list of the unfamiliar and the fantastic: aliens, animals, bugs, costumes, darkness, doctors, monsters, nightmares, strangers, thunder, witches, and more. Kids rely on their parents and other adults to soothe and protect them when they're afraid, but when adults don't do that, or (even worse) dismiss a child's legitimate fear as being just in their imagination, that adds an entirely new level to fear: the realization that the adults won't save them, they have to take care of the problem themselves, and they're not prepared for that responsibility.

Children in a horror situation face the same problems that adults do, but it's worse because their physical, mental, and social resources are much weaker. It's one thing for a group of soldiers to deal with a murderous alien on the loose, and it's an entirely different thing for a group of preteens to do it. Kids are smaller and weaker than adults, so they're at a disadvantage in any physical conflict. They don't understand how most technology works (for example, most kids couldn't hot-wire a car). Their resources are limited (they don't have money). They can't drive. They're not allowed to stay out as late as they want. They live in a culture where bullying by peers and older kids mostly goes unnoticed by adults. It's obvious if they're wandering around somewhere they're not supposed to be (a kid can't wear a mechanic disguise and bluff their way into an office). Almost every option that an adult has for dealing with a problem (particularly access to weapons) is something a child doesn't have, and worse, they'd probably get in trouble if they tried. In other words, not only do children need to deal with a horrific threat, but they also have to avoid or lie to the very same people that are supposed to protect them from that threat. Getting caught by their parents, a teacher, or a well-meaning security guard is almost as bad as getting captured by the aliens.

Horror Modules

- Character Posse
- Fragility
- Hallucination Reset
- Hysteria
- Instant Panic
- Poor Choices
- Shock
- Unease

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RISKS

This genre is the opposite of the creepy kids genre: instead of the children being the threat, the kids are the heroes. Although this usually means there's no risk of anyone getting squeamish when it's time to take down the bad guys (unless it's heroic kids against monstrous kids), it does mean that any violence in the game from NPCs is directed *at* the child PCs, which may make some players uncomfortable. You can mitigate this by having the enemies use nonlethal tactics (kids get caught in nets, sedated with tranquilizer darts, frozen with cold energy, and so on, instead of struck by punches or bullets) or have the physical threats come from environmental factors (such as hard rain or sliding down a hill) or inconveniences (bee stings, losing a shoe, and so on).

MAKING CHILD PROTAGONISTS SCARY IN YOUR GAME

When the players try unusual actions, take a second to think about what you as an adult would do if you caught some actual kids trying that, and use that to create interesting obstacles that are unique for children. Play up the weaknesses of being a child to make the threats seem greater. The world is bigger and more dangerous. Monsters are stronger and faster. Puzzles and problems are harder without knowledge you learn in your teens and twenties. (It's okay to let childhood be an advantage now and then, too, like escaping through an air duct or easily gaining the trust of an NPC kid who can provide crucial help.)

Child PCs as a concept blends well with most horror genres, and the tips for making those genres scary still apply when kids are in the driver's seat. Specifically for this genre, you should figure out why adults aren't active in the scenario (maybe they literally can't perceive the threat, or maybe they've already been brainwashed or kidnapped). Have the children's realization about that be an important part of the conflict, either early in the game to establish that they need to fix the problem, or later on when the kids feel confident and are shocked to realize that things are much worse than they thought.

When combining genres, mixing childlike innocence with Lovecraftian mind-wrecking insanity is probably a little much.

Child protagonist GM intrusion: *A parent insists their child needs to do their chores right now, and no you can't do them tomorrow.*

Child protagonist GM intrusion: *One parent sets an unfairly early curfew, and they don't care if the other kids get to stay out late.*

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The brightly clothed and face-painted clown or buffoon has been a common sight in circuses and theaters for at least two hundred years. Most of these clowns were comedic elements or social commentary, with only a few "bad apples" appearing in some performances, but starting in the 1970s and 1980s the idea of evil clowns became mainstream due to the work of horror writers, comics, humor magazines, and cartoons. People realized that clowns can be creepy. Clowns can be scary. And sometimes, clowns try to kill you.

Uncanny valley: A feeling of unease or revulsion caused by imperfect representations of human beings, such as humanoid robots, bad CGI with soulless eyes, and lifelike dolls. Even children are sensitive to these imperfect copies, suggesting that a primal survival mechanism may be involved.

Clowns are often associated with children, so evil clowns in a horror RPG might end up targeting kids, which can make a lot of people very squeamish. One way to avoid this is to have the clowns focus on adult characters unless the PCs are children. Consent, page 19.

Agencies such as the World Clown Association oppose malevolent portrayals of clowns and promote clowning as an uplifting, positive performance that brings joy to people. Their struggles with the "evil clown" stereotype are similar to how gamers in the 1980s had to deal with a misinformed moral panic about RPGs.

Clown GM intrusion: *Because of the clown's costume or weird proportions, the character's attack hits only padding instead of flesh, and the clown takes no damage.*

WHY ARE THEY SCARY?

Clowns break our expectations of "normal" in two ways—physical and social. Although based on human shapes, clowns are distorted and exaggerated into something that looks only mostly human, putting them firmly in the uncanny valley category. A clown's face is usually stark white, an unnatural coloration often associated with sickness or death. The drawn-on mouth, eyes, nose, and eyebrows are shapes and colors impossible for a true human, and the overall effect conceals or warps the clown's eyes. Their clothing might be padded or framed to create strange inhuman (or even demonic) shapes, creating a mystery about what they really look like and whether they're hiding anything. Their odd, comically intended motions (often augmented by their clothing) seem erratic and are often meant to appear weird or impossible (like flowers that squirt water, fake guns that make a loud noise with a "BANG!" flag, or cramming a dozen clowns into a tiny car).

Clowns stretch or break social norms. They talk in funny voices, pantomime, and give trinkets and presents to children who don't know them—all things that are out of place in a typical person's day or behavior. Their weird and bright clothing is jarring compared to a world of t-shirts, jeans, and business attire. The strange makeup (a permanent smile or frown) also helps conceal the clown's social cues, making it hard for a viewer to get a "read" on the clown's intentions—at a glance, it's hard to tell whether a clown is intent on murder because it appears to be smiling. Unkempt hair shows an indifference to grooming norms, and brightly colored hair is still viewed by many people as an act of rebellion, creating a general distrust and unease in a clown's presence. Performing clowns violate others' personal space and may make too much eye contact or avoid it altogether. Every "normal" thing a clown does is magnified—whether that's drinking a beer, riding the bus, or smoking a cigarette—into something odd.

HORROR MODULES

- Hysteria
- Instant Panic
- Last Survivor
- Poor Choices
- Secret Twist (switched with the killer)
- Unease

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RISKS

It's really easy for a game featuring clowns as villains to swerve into campy or comedy horror territory, where everything is puns and bad jokes and sight gags. The GM must have a light touch when adding jokes and other clown-related humor, and the players should be sure not to break the tension being built. Just in case they do, the GM should have a few ideas handy for shifting the tone toward where it should be.

MAKING CLOWNS SCARY IN YOUR GAME

Do an internet search for "creepy clown" to find suitable images, and either make printouts or create a slide show on an electronic device. Hide clown images on character sheets, the backs of XP cards, and room decorations to add to the startling and unnerving atmosphere. Tape a clown image to the bottom of the cup you're using so the players only see glimpses of it during the game. Tuck printed images into the rulebooks you've left out on the game table for players to find later.

Sometimes a high-contrast black-and-white image of a clown is more disturbing than a color one.

Pack envelopes with creepy clown images, mysterious notes, and useful things (like cypher cards, XP cards, or clues), then hand them out to players for an eerie surprise.

Tape a clown mask or puppet under the game table. Drop a pencil to give yourself an excuse to get under the table and put on the mask or retrieve the puppet, then do a jump-scare on the players. Alternatively, hide a mask or puppet in another room and pick them up while on a bathroom or beverage break. If you're willing to commit to it, GMing while wearing evil clown makeup is sure to be weird and memorable for your players.

Find a scary clown montage video and play it at 25% faster or slower speed to add to the eerie look, or play it backward.

Play a loop of scary clown or circus music, especially one with occasional quiet creepy laughter. (A loop of intermittent non-clown laughter that's sped up or slowed down is equally creepy.) Use props like a wind-up music box, tiny horns, or a bicycle bell to warn that the clown is nearby.

When the PCs see an evil clown, portray the weirdness of its physical presence. Watch videos of how clowns act and emulate those behaviors. Exaggerate your movements. Alternate between stillness, extreme jerky motions, and too-smooth fluidity so your presence is unpredictable and unnerving. Deliberately avoid eye contact by looking at a person's chin or ear when you speak to them, or stare too intensely and don't break eye contact. Make an eerie grin that shows too much teeth and use it like punctuation for things that aren't funny.

Comedy horror, page 46

Clown GM intrusion: *Killing or unmasking the clown reveals only an empty costume—one last trick to give the clown time to kill again.*

Evil clowns are often men, but perhaps that's just because the idea of a creepy murderer is more likely to conjure images of a man, even without a clown context.

Scary Clown Inspiration

Bad Clowns *(2016 Ben Radford book)*

It *(1986 Stephen King novel; 1990 miniseries; 2017 film franchise)*

The Joker (Batman villain)

Killer Klowns From Outer Space *(1988 film)*

The Dark Knight *(2008 film)*

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There's a long-standing tradition of mixing horror with comedy. Our natural reaction is to laugh when we're uncomfortable. Many low-budget horror films have such poor special effects that we can't help but laugh when we see them. And the characters in horror films often act so stupid that sometimes we want to cheer for the killer as they create elaborate and over-the-top ways to kill their sex-crazed teenaged targets (who made Poor Choices). We laugh because we know we're safely on the other side of the screen. Sometimes a horror creator embraces this funny or absurd aspect and creates something that isn't just horror with bursts of comedy to break the tension, but something that's deliberately part of the comedy horror genre.

"The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (published in 1820) is sometimes cited as a very early comedy horror story.

Poor Choices, page 94

Why Is It Scary and Funny?

Horror is already a melting pot of topics in that you can use straight-up horror on its own, mix it with another genre (such as fantasy or sci fi), or fold together multiple horror genres into a new thing. Comedy horror is scary for all the reasons that standard horror is scary: you can do anything you want with it.

Comedy horror intrusion: *Any intrusion from the horror elements you're using is good for comedy horror.*

Comedy horror is also funny for all of the reasons that comedy is funny. You can mix any aspect of horror with just about any aspect of comedy and get a unique result, especially as the players pick up on the comedy cues and run with them in ways you didn't expect.

Note that comedy horror often crosses over into black comedy territory, a genre that makes light of taboo subject matter (such as a genocidal alien invasion, demonic possession, or a rampaging serial killer). It's a blurry line, and it's all right for you or the players to wander freely between the two.

Horror Modules

- Character Posse
- Ghostly Helpers
- Hysteria
- Instant Panic
- Ironman
- Poor Choices
- Secret Twist (any)

Risks

Unlike running a horror game, where it's important to maintain the proper mood so the game is scary, the point of comedy horror (and black comedy) is to be scared and to laugh. If events veer far toward one of those extremes, you can try steering things back toward the middle, let them seesaw fully from one to the other, or just let the game keep building up in that area. If the game ends up as 90% horror, 90% hilarious, or an even mix of the two, you and the players will have a memorable experience.

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Making Your Game Scary and Funny

Use the advice for the horror genres you're using to make the game scary.

Comedy has its own extensive list of genres. It's hard to inject humor into a situation unless you know what everyone in the group thinks is funny; it's better to pick one or two elements from comedy genres as seeds and let the players develop them accordingly.

The following are some examples of comedy genres and how you can turn them loose in a horror game.

Black Comedy: Deals with disturbing or taboo subjects such as murder and terrorism. Alien invaders might individually chase people with high-tech blasters that literally turn their targets into cooked turkeys. Demons might possess people and gorge themselves on food until the hosts literally explode like Mr. Creosote in *The Meaning of Life* (1983 Monty Python film).

Blue Comedy: Typically sexual in nature or full of profane language. A monster might look like gigantic genitals. A robot army experiences a glitch and can speak only in profanities. An alien species' name (or the leader's name) sounds like a crass word or a biological function, leading the humans to make fun of it.

Character Comedy: Comes from a humorous persona invented by a performer (such as Borat, Larry the Cable Guy, or Mr. Bean). Each PC might be based on or literally be one of these characters, all brought together for a live TV comedy special just as the horror starts happening.

Deadpan Comedy: Jokes made without a change of facial expression or a change of emotion. A TV-obsessed alien might recite jokes but mess up the timing or inflection. A psychotic robot might invent and repeat a catchphrase that sounds ridiculous and doesn't make sense.

Musical Comedy: The humor comes from music with lyrics, such as Weird Al's parody songs. Best left to players with extensive knowledge of songs and the ability to improvise lyrics to the beat or find an appropriate and funny quote for the situation.

Prop Comedy: Relies on ridiculous props or commonplace objects used in funny ways. Alien clowns go on a murder spree using lethal versions of traditional clown props like horns, oversized shoes, and flowers that squirt water. Kids have to defeat a gang of magical clowns using toys and other gimmicks, which harm the clowns like real weapons. Better yet, give the players silly children's toys and action figures (perhaps military prototypes that were accidentally thrown away) and have them act out how these items have a real effect in the game. A ridiculous amount of blood shooting out of a decapitated corpse could count as a prop under the right circumstances.

Wordplay: Clever manipulation of words; includes puns, spoonerisms, and double entendres. If you have a habit of accidentally making names that are easy to exploit, this is perfect for your group. Some of the players' responses will be tabletop banter for their own entertainment, but some of it might be done in character to provoke a reaction from NPCs.

Comedy horror intrusion: *A character avoids what would have been a lethal attack, but must make a Might or Speed defense roll at the same difficulty to avoid being killed by a convenient but accidental death trap, such as an open electrical box, a spiked fence, a falling bucket of bricks, or a deep patch of wet cement.*

Comedy Horror Inspiration

An American Werewolf in London *(1981 film)*

Beetlejuice *(1988 film)*

Evil Dead II *(1987 film)*

The Frighteners *(1996 film)*

The Lost Boys *(1987 film)*

Santa Clarita Diet *(2017 TV series)*

Shaun of the Dead *(2004 film)*

Tucker & Dale vs. Evil *(2010 film)*

What We Do in the Shadows *(2014 film; 2019 TV series)*

Zombieland *(2009 film)*

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Uncanny valley: A feeling of unease or revulsion caused by imperfect representations of human beings, such as humanoid robots, bad CGI with soulless eyes, and lifelike dolls. Even children are sensitive to these imperfect copies, suggesting that a primal survival mechanism may be involved.

There's an anecdote about a father who shaved off his beard and was asked by his child if he had put on a new head, perhaps because the kid didn't understand shaving or didn't know that swapping heads isn't something people do.

Creepy kid GM intrusion: *The child authentically cries or does something that evokes sympathy, preventing the character from taking hostile actions for one turn.*

Do an internet search for "creepiest things said by kids" and take notes for your game.

Twins and other multiples can add to the spooky nature of creepy kids. Examples of this include the young girls in The Shining *and the similar-looking children in* Village of the Damned.

Human children are all around us. We literally need them to make sure we survive as a species. But there's something primal and strange about children, and some of them manifest those traits so strongly that they're downright eerie.

WHY ARE THEY SCARY?

Children don't look like adults. Their physical proportions and the shapes of their faces aren't startling to us because they're small and we see so many of them, but a baby, toddler, or young child that was the size of an adult would be monstrous, firmly in the uncanny valley. Somehow, a child with an emotionless stare or a malicious grin seems even weirder than an adult with the same expression.

Kids don't act like adults. They wander into other peoples' personal space, are fairly clumsy (mainly because their bodies are growing so fast that their reflexes are constantly trying to catch up), engage in repetitive behaviors, and (because of their height) have to crawl or climb over things in their environment.

Children don't think like adults. Their brains are ravenous for information and constantly processing an overwhelming amount of info they've never experienced before, so they often have very limited awareness outside their immediate reach. They have imaginary friends and personify inanimate objects. They create theories about how the world works based on their own emotions and imaginations, and often have poor understanding of the consequences of their actions. They may not understand the concept of right from wrong and are still learning social cues.

Of course, all of these factors are more apparent if you're a person who doesn't spend much time around children. Familiarity normalizes them, like how having a snake or tarantula as a pet makes those animals' movements seem as comforting as those of a happy cat or dog.

HORROR MODULES

- Character Posse
- Poor Choices
- Unease

RISKS

Many people—especially parents or those who are responsible for the care of children—may be very uncomfortable with a scenario where a child or something appearing to be a child is threatened or harmed, or acts violently out of character compared to a real child. A game with a creepy kid as a potential antagonist is probably not the sort of thing you'd want to play in a public space because bystanders may get the wrong impression.

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Making Creepy Kids Scary in Your Game

One key idea is that it should take a long time for the PCs to figure out whether the creepy kid is responsible for whatever strangeness is happening, or is just another victim who has an unusual sensitivity to the true cause. By keeping the PCs wondering if the danger is the child or if something supernatural (such as a demon or ghost) is acting through or framing them, the child remains an active part of the events of the story.

The following suggestions are all things the child could do, be, or say to create unease and fear in the PCs and players.

- Momentarily look, move, or talk like someone much older.
- Take a PC's hand, and the kid's hand feels unnaturally cold, hot, or wet.
- Take a small animal (such as a frog or beetle, alive or dead) from their pocket and drop it or offer it to a PC.
- Have a conversation with themselves or someone unseen, which may or may not be relevant to what's going on around them.
- Draw something enigmatic, morbid, or representing something important to the current story.
- Reveal scratches and bruises that weren't there before.
- Draw on their faces with food or paint.
- Wander away or simply vanish when nobody is looking.
- Vomit or cry (especially if it's something unusual, such as blood or black oil)
- Scream three or four times and then stop.
- Pass out.
- Levitate, spin, or slide across the floor.
- Dance.
- React to or point at something that isn't there.
- Tell someone they're going to die "soon" or "next."
- Sing a silly song with creepy overtones, or a song they wouldn't know the lyrics to.
- Say something that an adult would say, like quoting a poker dealer or an old sportscaster.

Creepy kid GM intrusion: *The child has insight about something they'd have no way of knowing, perhaps from a past life or a ghost or demon "friend."*

Creepy Kid Inspiration

The Babadook *(2014 film)*

The Bad Seed *(1956 film)*

The Brood *(1979 film)*

"Children of the Corn" (1977 Stephen King short story)

"It's a Good Life" (1961 The Twilight Zone *episode)*

The Omen *(1976)*

Pet Sematary *(1983 Stephen King novel; 1989 film)*

The Shining *(1980 film)*

Village of the Damned *(1960 film)*

Who Can Kill a Child? *aka* ¿Quién Puede Matar a un Niño *(1976 film)*

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Of course, this genre is talking about people and religions that do evil, not faiths or organizations that are sometimes classified as "occult" but have a life-affirming philosophy.

Most people believe in things outside the realm of science—religion, fate, luck, ghosts, and demons are all supernatural beliefs, often passed down within families or regional traditions. Modern culture is still peppered with centuries-old superstitions, and not all of them are benign. Human sacrifice, witchcraft, curses, Satanism, and other trappings of dark magic still creep about in the shadows of our minds and culture.

This category also includes evil supernatural objects (such as cursed items, demonic books, and spirit boards) that fall into the hands of unknowing people.

WHY IS IT SCARY?

Followers of mainstream religions believe that demons and angels are real, actual miracles happen, and prayer can cure sickness. Normal, otherwise reasonable people sometimes believe ridiculous conspiracy theories like the Apollo moon landings were faked or the government is hiding evidence of alien visitors to Earth. With so many people willing to believe something based on no evidence whatsoever, it's not outrageous that there might be individuals or secret cults that believe in dark magic, performing evil rituals in the hopes of bringing harm to others and garnering wealth and favors for themselves. Much in the same way that it's horrifying to think that your neighbor might secretly be a serial killer, they just as easily could be a demon-worshipping cultist. Most fiction about the occult involves a naive protagonist discovering evidence of supernatural activity and realizing that it's all real—a magical conspiracy existing undetected all this time, often with their friends and family members as participants, sworn to keep the secret from the protagonist "until they're ready to know the truth."

It's pretty standard for a dark ritual or a cult's patron to want blood, souls, or both. Don't be afraid to go to that well—it's deep.

Some of the fear of the occult is fear of the unknown. A group of people standing around an altar, wearing strange clothing, and chanting in Latin is a little creepy if you don't know what's going on. It only gets scarier once you realize they're holding knives and wearing goat masks, and there's a chained human on the altar.

HORROR MODULES

- Bad Penny
- Ghostly Helpers
- Hysteria
- Madness
- Perilous Venture
- Poor Choices
- Secret Twist (allied with the bad guys)
- Unease

Occult GM intrusion: *A masked cultist reveals themselves to be someone the character thought was an ally, and attacks with surprise.*

RISKS

Many people sincerely believe that dark magic is real, whether it's a casual belief that "Satanists" are an evil supernatural force or that Wiccans are enemies of their faith, or the extremely bigoted idea that some real-world religions or ethnicities perform human sacrifices. Introducing occult elements to a game may make those people genuinely uncomfortable, so you should always check for consent.

Consent, page 19

Because of Hollywood stereotypes, religious bigotry, and general ignorance,

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many actual religions (particularly Paganism and Wicca) are sometimes painted with an evil or occult brush, and by putting them in a game, you risk offending players who may be members of those religions or have close friends who are. Instead of using real-world names for cults, make up your own (which also gives you creative license to incorporate any beliefs, garments, or rituals you want into the group).

Making the Occult Scary in Your Game

Unlike the flash-bang magic of fantasy wizardry, occult magic in a modern setting tends to be based on rituals that require a lot of planning and take time to perform. The slow buildup of these rituals—often involving multiple people working together—helps build tension for the players, even if they know about the ritual but aren't present for it. Iconic times (such as sunrise, sunset, and midnight) help play up the authentic feel for this sort of magic and create an atmospheric mood for the upcoming conflict with the cult practitioners.

Solitary practitioners of dark magic might have been taught their skills by an ancestor—perhaps one who can still advise them as a ghost, a mummified corpse who can whisper secrets, or a spirit bound to a cursed object. Active cults with multiple adherents might have learned their magic the same way, or from a patron—such as a demon, dark god, or horrifying extradimensional being—who rewards their devotion and empowers their rituals. Any of those genres' suggestions for adding horror to your game also apply here.

If the PCs are friends with an NPC, make that NPC a target of an occult ritual. If there are no friendly NPCs, an innocent stranger will do. If neither of those are options, putting a PC in line to be sacrificed in a ritual is an easy way to frighten and motivate the players. Some rituals require a willing sacrifice, so there's always the opportunity to have a "rescued" victim double-cross the PCs when they're vulnerable.

Not all cults are part of the *occult*. A secret club of people who commit a ritual murder every year for the fun of it is still evil and dangerous even though they don't have magical powers—and their ritualistic trappings might lead the PCs into making assumptions about how to defeat them. Similarly, just because a cult believes something to be true doesn't mean it's magical or real. Any weird effects that happen could be faked with technology (whether or not the other members of the cult know it's fake). None of this makes the cultists any less dangerous or zealous in their beliefs. In fact, people are more likely to double down on a belief when confronted with evidence that disproves it, and someone whose faith is shattered might be filled with enough despair to throw away their own life trying to kill the person who dashed their dreams.

Occult GM intrusion: *A cultist cuts their arm with a dagger (inflicting 2 points of damage), activating a dark magic spell that eases their next action by two steps.*

Occult Inspiration

"Children of the Corn" (1977 Stephen King short story)

The Craft *(1996 film)*

The Endless *(2017 film)*

From Hell *(1989 Alan Moore graphic novel)*

"The Haunter of the Dark" (1936 H. P. Lovecraft short story)

Hereditary *(2018 film)*

The Ritual *(2017 film)*

The Shadow Over Innsmouth *(1936 H. P. Lovecraft novella)*

Sherlock Holmes *(2009 film)*

The Wicker Man *(1973 film)*

The Witch *(2015 film)*

Even if a patron never directly manifests in the game, decide who it is and what it wants so the cultists have a clear purpose and can act in the interest of that entity.

Demons, page 54

Lovecraftian, page 64

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This section focuses on fictional people who are murderous cannibals as a lifestyle and degenerate families that choose to inbreed. This isn't about victims of terrible circumstances or abuse.

Cannibal: *level 3, deception and other interaction tasks as level 6; health 12*

In an RPG, cannibalism may transmit curses, alien parasites or viruses, or psychic or demonic infestation.

Oddly, humans that turn into human-eating monsters such as werewolves are not generally considered cannibals.

There are evil people who kill humans, and there are some who take it to the next level and eat the humans they kill. Although we're blasé about saying an evil witch in a fairy tale wants to cook and eat children, the idea of humans eating humans is disgusting and terrifying. An individual cannibal is an aberration, but an entire family of them is a serious threat. As these habits are frowned upon and hidden away, groups of cannibals must protect their secret rituals from outsiders who would condemn and expose them, so they marry and breed among their own, magnifying their sickness and further isolating them from normal ideas of right and wrong. After many generations, they may become their own species, hidden away from humanity and the light of the sun.

Why Are They Scary?

We humans have an instinctive revulsion toward other humans being eaten, partly out of respect for the dead (and our own future corpses) and partly in arrogant defense of our role as the dominant species on the planet: "Nobody eats *us*, damnit—*we* eat *them*!" Being confronted with a cannibal is like pursuing a horrible crime beyond its most extreme end. Murder might be a crime of passion, but no normal person could ever be so angry that they will eat someone they killed. Eating other humans is viscerally aberrant, as well as a crime, a sin, and a source of indelible shame. A cannibal is someone so broken, so outside of normal society, that they don't feel or don't care about any of that, and that makes them dangerous.

Likewise, incest is a taboo in every human culture to at least a moderate extent. If you encounter someone who wants to mate with members of their own family, you know there's something wrong with them. And if you find a whole family of such people, there's something *really* wrong with them. So PCs who discover themselves in the midst of a family of inbreeding degenerates should realize that if these people are willing to break such a universal and strong taboo, they're probably willing to break just about any other taboo or cultural restriction—torture, murder, necrophilia, cannibalism, and so on, with the PCs as the victims.

In other words, these degenerates have chosen to give up something that is fundamentally human. That scares us because it reminds us that we're basically brutal, clever animals operating under a veneer of civilization, in the same way that zombies and skeletons remind us that we're just gross meat and bones piloted by a brain that's a few steps above a beast.

Horror Modules

- Hysteria
- Last Survivor
- Poor Choices
- Secret Twist (allied with the degenerates)
- Unease

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Risks

Unlike stories of werewolves and vampires, cannibals and incestuous relationships are real, with real human victims. If you introduce these topics into a game, some players might be disturbed enough that they'll want to stop playing. Knowing your players, understanding their ability to handle a mature topic, and being especially aware of the consent issues are the keys to using this topic in a horror game, as is knowing when to stop if someone decides it's crossing a line.

Making Degenerates Scary in Your Game

The stereotypical encounter with cannibals is an otherwise-normal dinner where the hungry protagonists are served a hearty meal, only realizing partway through or afterward that they were fed human flesh. This is often how degenerates "recruit" people into their culture, knowing that once they get over the initial shock, some visitors might choose to remain out of shame and guilt than risk anyone ever finding out (and anyone who freaks out gets eaten, so it's a win-win for the cannibals).

Degenerates often have a disturbing fascination with taxidermy; a cabin or lodge with wall-to-wall stuffed animal heads is eerie and hints at secrets hidden in the attic and basement. In areas that outsiders can't get to, degenerates might display trophies from their kills, such as decorating a room with skeletons or hanging family photos that show them preparing unusual cuts of meat.

Cannibals may keep humans as prisoners to use as food, carefully amputating parts of them at a time so the rest of the meat remains fresh, which initially might lead the PCs to think that the prisoners were merely tortured rather than slowly cannibalized. An unfortunate PC might be captured and escape only after the degenerates cut off an arm or leg as a quick meal.

Degenerates may have odd tics or other repetitive behaviors (whether from insanity, neurological damage, or poor socialization) that are disturbing to outsiders. Examples include twitching, giggling or laughing, picking their skin, licking or smacking their lips, tugging their hair, chattering their teeth, and making slurping sounds. Pick one or two traits and perform them when roleplaying members of that group; if any of these tics are audible instead of visual, letting the PCs hear the noises (either made by you or prerecorded) adds to the tension.

Inbreeding may reinforce the degenerates' genetic traits, which in a game can give them superhuman abilities like enhanced senses, regeneration, thicker skin, feral claws and teeth, or even something invisible like psychic powers. Playing up these abilities highlights how long their debased lineage has been active, enhancing the horrific idea that this has been going on for generations, undetected by normal people. In a crossover with the body horror category, some degenerates might have extreme physical mutations such as intelligent parasitic twins, functional extra limbs, aberrant growths on the skin (eyes, teeth, mouths, fingers), or living, blob-like humans that lack most skeletal structures.

Other potentially unusual (but harmless) inherited traits like red hair or heterochromia can become more common in degenerate families, making their presence a "tell" for being associated with the family. For example, if twins run in the family, each generation could have one or more sets of twins (allowing for some doppelganger tropes and "we thought we caught the real killer" mistakes).

Warning: *Before doing research on films and fiction involving degenerate families, know that their stories often have violent sexual aspects.*

Consent, page 19

Degenerate Inspiration

Baba Yaga (Slavic folklore)

C.H.U.D. *(1984 film)*

Cloud Atlas *(2012 film)*

The Descent *(2005 film)*

"Home" (1996 X-Files episode)

Ravenous *(1999 film)*

Sawney Bean *(Scottish folklore)*

Soylent Green *(1973 film)*

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street *(1979 musical; 2007 film)*

The Road *(2006 Cormac McCarthy novel; 2009 film)*

We Are What We Are *(2010 film; 2013 remake)*

Wendigo (Algonquin legend)

The Time Machine *(1895 H. G. Wells novel)*

Body horror, page 40

Using real-world birth defects as distinctive traits for an inbred family is very insensitive. Don't do it.

Doppelgangers, page 56

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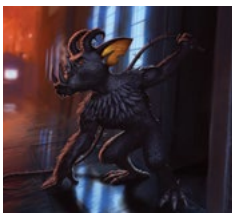
Demons are evil creatures from another world—perhaps Hell, or the darkness before creation, or merely another dimension. Depending on the story being told, demons may seek to corrupt humans into evil, acquire souls, inflict pain, or even unravel all of reality. Regardless of their specific motive, they are no friends to humanity, but may be bargained with, providing mortals with material wealth, magical power, or forbidden knowledge in exchange for actions that advance their plans.

For the purpose of this book, "demons" and "devils" are synonymous.



WHY ARE THEY SCARY?

Although most other creatures from horror might be mysterious, conflicted, or redeemable, demons are pretty much evil through and through. Their goals are evil, their methods are evil, and they enjoy the suffering of other beings. You can count on a demon choosing the most horrible, painful, wicked option, and if it seems it is being kind, merciful, or generous, it's almost certainly doing so because those actions benefit itself or its agenda in the long run.

Demons are ancient beings (some of them predate humanity or even creation itself), and that gives them patience and perspective that most mortals can't even comprehend. A vampire might wait decades until its enemies are old and vulnerable, but to some demons that's quaint, as they've been waiting for thousands or millions of years for their plans to come to fruition. Demons have seen civilizations rise and fall, and they know that mortals are most desperate when things are bleak, like in the face of tragedy or when they're about to die of old age.

Although some demons are mere brutes, the most dangerous ones are incredibly intelligent, with secret knowledge about magic, physics, and history that informs every decision they make. Their agreements are notorious for having deceptive small print and loopholes they can easily leverage to their advantage. Demons are smart enough to cheat, and to do so in ways that can be discovered only with a law degree and a magnifying glass.

Some demons can possess humans, and it's not immediately obvious. A friend, lover, family member, or fellow PC might appear normal, but is actually sowing the seeds of corruption in everyone around. If the demon can be forced out of its host body, it is likely to remain a spiritual entity immune to physical attacks, and the only way to get rid of it (for a while) might be a forgotten old ritual in a lost book.

Demon GM intrusion: *The demon takes the form of or speaks in the voice of a dead person known to a character (especially one who is trying to harm or exorcise it), hindering the character's next action by three steps.*

HORROR MODULES

- Bad Penny
- Ghostly Helpers
- Hysteria
- Instant Panic
- Last Survivor
- Madness
- Perilous Venture
- Poor Choices
- Possession
- Shock
- Unease

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RISKS

Because demons are universally evil, most players won't have any objection to fighting against them in a game. However, drawing too much on real Earth religions might be a sensitive subject for some players, especially those who believe that supernatural entities like demons actually exist and shouldn't be spoken of lightly for fear of attracting their attention.

Consent, page 19

MAKING DEMONS SCARY IN YOUR GAME

The demon should act like it isn't worried about anything the PCs can do; the PCs should feel that its taunts and crimes are just a game to hurt them and innocent people, and there's nothing they can do to stop it, like a handful of ants trying to stop a violent child from stomping their nest. If the demon is usually intangible but can take an illusory or physical form, it can pretend to be hurt by whatever meager weapons are used against it, only to shrug off these attacks as nothing. If the demon is a really good actor, it will pretend that ineffectual attacks against it are actually hurting it to lull the PCs into a false sense of hope.

If you don't mind your game room looking like an occultist's workshop, decorate with red lights, candles, pentagrams, and other symbols representing evil and Hell. Find audio of Gregorian chants (perhaps recorded backward), maniacal laughter, or an appropriate movie soundtrack and play it during the game.

The demon will lie about anything to gain an advantage over its opponents. It'll claim that it is a host of demons possessing one person, that it was the serpent in the Garden of Eden, or that it is the Adversary himself. It'll lie about the only thing that can stop it (to set the PCs on a false trail to find something harmless) or that there is a deadline for anyone to have a chance to stop it (to force the PCs to cut corners and act before they're ready). It may try to fool people into thinking they're hallucinating instead of seeing true supernatural activity (including convincing investigators that the subject is faking or has a mental illness, such as by flinching from regular water as if it were holy water).

Demons have many abilities that allow them to use scares from other genres, particularly body horror, creepy kids, dark magic and the occult, dolls and puppets, ghosts, insanity, simulacra, slashers and serial killers, vampires, werewolves, and zombies. They may even pretend to be a different kind of horror to mislead the PCs.

Demons traffic in souls—not only will they kill a PC, but they'll also drag the character's spiritual essence into Hell (or whatever realm they're from), use it as fuel for magic, or simply eat it. Under other circumstances, PCs who die while trying to save the world at least know that they'll go on to their appropriate reward in the afterlife, but against demons, those who die are likely to become nothing at all. Whether or not the campaign allows for people to come back from the dead, the annihilation of one's existence should scare any PC—even atheist characters, who are suddenly confronted with evidence that there are souls, there is some sort of awareness and identity after death, and (like in life) existence can be tortured or eradicated.

Demon GM intrusion: *The demon possesses a nearby weak-willed innocent person (such as a child) to force the characters into a difficult choice: attack it or allow it to escape.*

Demon GM intrusion: *The demon consumes a soul or activates dark magic, giving it two assets on all tasks for one or more rounds.*

Demon Inspiration

Constantine *(2005 film based on a comic book character)*

Demon Knight *(1995 film)*

The Exorcist *(1973 film)*

Fallen *(1998 film)*

Hellboy *(1994 comic franchise; 2004 film)*

Hellraiser *(1987 film)*

Prince of Darkness *(1987 film)*

Veronica *aka* Verónica *(2017 film)*

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Clones, evil twins, mirror-universe counterparts, robot doubles, changelings, and shapechangers who duplicate another person's form are basically doppelgangers for the purpose of this horror genre.

You are you—except when there's something else that looks just like you, pretending to be you. Doppelgangers may just want to have their own existence, but in horror, they usually want to steal your identity and live as you, which might mean you have to die.

WHY ARE THEY SCARY?

Duplicated places can be an interesting twist. For example, the PCs go to a new part of the city to discover an exact duplicate of a family-owned restaurant they know, but with entirely different people working there, all of them strangers.

Unless you were born an identical twin, you are used to being the only person who looks just like you. It's one thing to see someone who looks like you, and another, more confusing and terrifying thing to see someone who looks *exactly* like you. When suddenly confronted by the existence of your doppelganger, you wonder what they've been doing up until now and what they plan to do next. The shock and dread from this is a combination of mistaken identity, identity fraud, and an existentialist crisis all wrapped up into one moment. Then the questions come rolling in. Have they been sleeping with my spouse? Been in my home? Interacted with my children and pets? Do they know about me at all? Do they wish me harm? Are they a clone? A monster? A hallucination? Am I the copy? Are we the same person? Have I been having blackouts? How can I make people believe that this is happening, or prove that I'm the real me?

Adding time-traveling PCs to a game introduces a new aspect to doppelgangers—characters with varying motives pretending to be themselves from different time periods.

Using a doppelganger in a horror game is all about pushing these questions to the forefront of the character's mind and generating uncertainty about their identity and perhaps even their existence. You want the PC to feel doubt and dread, to be suspicious of everything they know and remember. If you want a happy ending, you can wrap up the scenario with the PCs learning the truth about themselves and their copies, but it's fine to have a more ambiguous ending where there are still many unanswered questions and the players have different theories about what really happened.

A reverse of the doppelganger concept is thinking you have a double but the twin is a hallucination, either an imaginary friend or your way of coping with the real twin's unexpected death.

Doppelganger GM intrusion: *An NPC mistakes the character for their doppelganger (or vice versa) and starts a conversation or a fight about something they think the person in front of them did.*

HORROR MODULES

- Hysteria
- Last Survivor
- Secret Twist (switched places)
- Unease

RISKS

If one or more PCs end up swapping with the doppelgangers, it can become confusing for the characters to remember their roles and who they're loyal to. Having some secret way for the PCs to track this (such as with a coded token, a specific d6 on the table, or a text message) will help. However, if things get blurry, that's just another aspect of the scenario, as some of the doppelgangers might be sympathetic to the originals (and vice versa).

Making a person doubt their own feelings, memories, and experiences is called gaslighting. It's a manipulative tactic that abusive people use to control their romantic partners. Remember that it is acceptable to gaslight the *characters*, but not the *players*.

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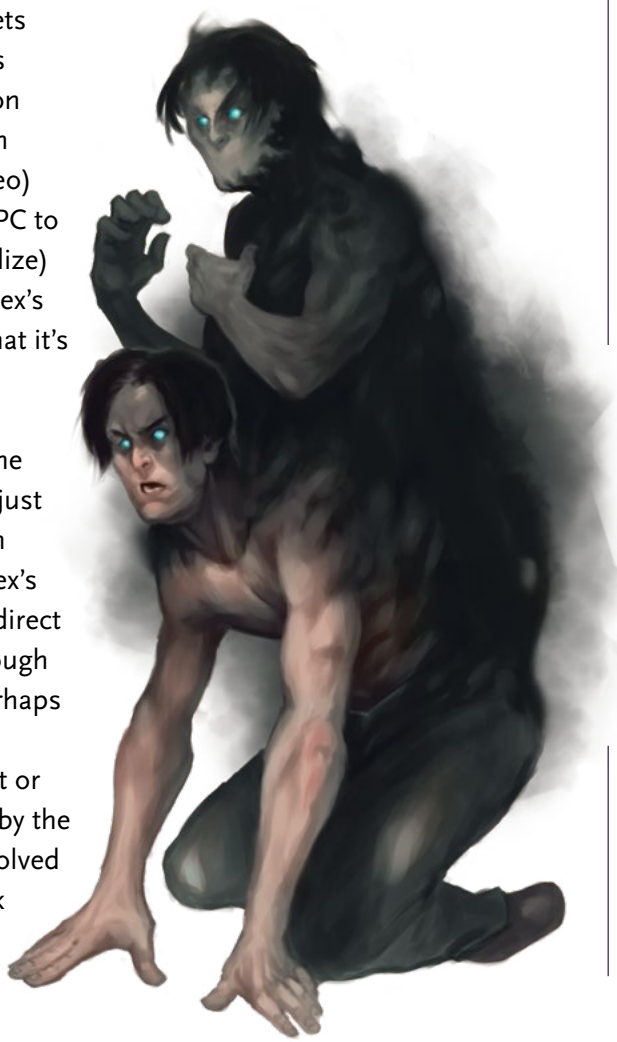
A social aspect of a doppelganger scenario is that it creates discord within the party. Make sure the players can handle their characters being paranoid about each other or even hostile toward each other, and that those feelings don't spill over into their real-life interactions.

Making Doppelgangers Scary in Your Game

Using doubles works best when the idea is teased at first and escalates over time until the big reveal that an identical copy of one or more PCs is walking around. For example, the PCs might catch a glimpse of a person watching them from a crowd who looks similar to the character played by Alex, but not overtly identified as such ("medium height, black hair, lean"), and the person gets away before anyone gets a good look at them. Later, the PCs might hear secondhand information about this person (such as from an eyewitness or a grainy security video) that gives enough details for an NPC to point out (or for another PC to realize) that the description is similar to Alex's character (and you should agree that it's "similar").

Later still, as an optional step, one PC gets a really good look at the person and realizes that they look just like Alex's character, or the PC even momentarily mistakes them for Alex's character. Finally, Alex's PC gets a direct look at the doppelganger, long enough to realize that they're identical (perhaps with the exception of clothing or a minor cosmetic detail like a haircut or scar). Alex suddenly is confronted by the idea that all of the prior events involved this doppelganger and has to think about identity questions.

Alternatively, have the PC discover their doppelganger while alone (perhaps with you talking to the player alone as well), and the surprise gives the double enough time to get away. Does the PC tell the other characters about it? Does the player tell the other players? If the PC is open about this revelation, the game becomes a cat-and-mouse situation where the other characters are always wondering or testing the PC to determine if they're real or a copy. If the PC keeps it secret, the doppelganger can switch with the character one or more times, giving the player the opportunity to act as both the PC and the doppelganger. As a further twist, tell the player that they're playing "a" doppelganger, not "the" doppelganger, so they wonder if other characters have likewise been replaced.



Doppelganger GM intrusion: *A PC experiences a vision or memory of doing something they weren't present for—confirmed by seeing their own hands, their face in a mirror, or the like—and is stunned for one round in confusion.*

Doppelganger Inspiration

Annihilation *(2018 film)*

Battlestar Galactica *(2004 TV series)*

Coherence *(2013 film)*

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? *(1968 Philip K. Dick novel)*

The Dark Half *(1989 Stephen King novel)*

Goodnight, Mommy *(2014 film)*

The Hole in the Ground *(2019 film)*

Invasion of the Body Snatchers *(1978 film)*

Moon *(2009 film)*

The One I Love *(2014 film)*

The Prestige *(2006 film)*

Primer *(2004 film)*

Us *(2019 film)*

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Ghosts, spirits, haunts, or a dozen other terms all refer to the souls or echoes of a person who has died but still clings to the mortal world. They're ubiquitous enough that there are ghost costumes for very young children—a safe sort of scare. Of course, there are dangerous ghosts, those that don't understand they're dead, those that fear what waits for them beyond the veil, and those that wish to inflict harm on the living.

Ghost GM intrusion: *A ghost possesses a character who fails an Intellect defense roll. The possessed character is controlled by the ghost until the character makes an Intellect defense roll to free themselves.*

WHY ARE THEY SCARY?

Ghosts used to be *people*. Maybe even people you knew when they were alive. Becoming a ghost is a horrible, traumatic transition, and there's no guarantee that a person who was your friend in life might still be kind to you as a ghost. The part clinging to the mortal world might be all of their jealousy, anger, and fear. They're ready to strike out at anything that might cut their last tie to the living world. They may be fixated on some petty thing you did years ago and forgot about. Or, because their perception is so skewed now, they might see you (and everyone) as someone who hurt or betrayed them, and the only way they can put an end to their misery is to lash out. They may not even realize that they're dead.

Ghost GM intrusion: *An attack that would normally kill a ghost only drives it away for a few minutes, during which time it may be vulnerable.*

And that's just the ghosts of nice and normal people. The ghost of a bully, thief, or murderer isn't going to become a better person now that they're dead. Whatever twisted thing inside that made them want to hurt other people may be the very thing that allows them to remain in the world as a ghost, amplified to become the driving force of their personality. Angry ghosts, jealous ghosts, cruel ghosts, vindictive ghosts. Ghosts with grudges. Ghosts who want to make the world pay for what happened to them, and don't care if their victims are innocent or guilty. Ghosts of people who were insane when alive and are even more damaged now that they're dead. It's these ghosts that are the real danger, and they have the will not only to inflict harm on the living but also to trap the souls of their victims with them, spreading their corruption to others.

Ghosts might present themselves as transparent versions of how they looked in life, but a ghost is a remnant of a dead person, and some aspect of them is how they died. A ghost's appearance might change from an innocuous floating spirit to a mangled corpse or back again, and the transformation might not be voluntary or comfortable. It is possible that these changes happen when the ghost suddenly remembers its terrifying and painful last moments, and it might blame anyone or anything nearby for triggering that memory.

HORROR MODULES

- Dead All Along
- Ghostly Helpers
- Hallucination Reset
- Hysteria
- Instant Panic
- Madness
- Perilous Venture
- Possession
- Shock

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RISKS

Because ghosts are intangible, it's easy for players to become frustrated that they're not able to strike back at a ghost that is able to hurt them. When running a scenario with ghosts, decide if the PCs are supposed to get rid of the ghosts or if they're just supposed to survive (perhaps to a particular time). If their goal is to end the haunting, make sure they can find clues as to how to do that—perhaps by performing a ritual, burying their mortal remains, or completing an unfinished task. If the scenario is about survival and fear rather than solving a problem, clearly present the situation as such—tell them that nobody has stayed in the house for more than a few hours before fleeing or that nobody has gotten out of the house alive. Manage player expectations so they know what their goals are and won't waste their efforts trying to fix a problem that you don't want fixed.

MAKING GHOSTS SCARY IN YOUR GAME

Do an internet search for haunted house stories and creepy ghost encounters. Use these real-life anecdotes as inspiration for your game. Some might be suitable for only a single scare or eerie encounter—mysterious photos found on a phone, friends seeing a black shape following you home, and so on—but some have enough unsettling details to fill an entire game session with terror.

Ghosts don't have to obey the physical limitations of a building. They can pass through walls to cut off a living person's escape, and some of them can fly. Use this mobility to make the PCs feel surrounded and trapped. Unlike when being chased by a corporeal being, you can't protect yourself from a ghost by hiding in a room and blocking the door.

Remember that spirits can have personal quirks just like living people—mannerisms, quotes, physical tics—and use these to make each ghost more real and memorable. Decide how it died, what it looks like when peaceful, and how it looks and acts when enraged. If there are multiple ghosts present, figure out the social dynamics of the group. Is one the leader? Does it command the others out of fear? Is it responsible for their deaths? Are there any neutral ghosts who hide from others and might be willing to converse with the PCs? Which of them have personal connections to the characters, and are those connections positive or negative? Think of a haunting scenario as the PCs wanting to infiltrate and escape a base full of entrenched enemies, and let those potential interactions be the hook that gets the players to start roleplaying with the ghosts.

Search for spooky photos of ghosts and use them as decorations or on an electronic device (and do the same with ghost videos). Use candles for lighting in the gaming area and give each player a tiny flashlight for viewing their character sheet (paralleling the light their PC might be carrying). Play audio loops of spooky ghost and organ music. If the ghosts in the game are associated with a haunted or cursed object, find an item like it and keep it on the table for the players to see. If the players are comfortable with the idea, have a séance in the game, and use a soundboard app to add a scary atmosphere to the scene.

Ghost GM intrusion: *A ghost says something cryptic about a dead person who was known by a character, hinting at secrets to be revealed or a task that leaves them unable to pass on.*

Ghost Inspiration

The Conjuring *(2013 film)*

The Devil's Backbone *(2001 film)*

A Ghost Story *(2017 film)*

The Haunting *(1963 film)*

The Innocents *(1961 film)*

The Others *(2001 film)*

Poltergeist *(1982 film)*

The Ring *(2002 film)*

The Shining *(1980 film)*

The Sixth Sense *(1999 film)*

Stir of Echoes *(1999 film)*

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"This kind of thing . . . it doesn't start by one person telling a story. It's more like everyone's fear just takes on a life of its own."
—Ringu

Group GM intrusion: *The game takes a dark turn as the PCs see one of their own killed or dragged off by a ghost, only to snap out of it a moment later and realize it was a dream or hallucination. Or was it foreshadowing?*

It's almost certain that non-American horror fans feel the same way about horror created by Americans—like confused outsiders.

Japanese horror and Korean horror are specific genres that share many common themes with each other and have a distinct feel and presentation compared to American or European horror. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, American remakes of J-horror and K-horror films drew attention to their original sources, which gave audiences new takes on established concepts like ghosts, madness, and zombies.

J-horror tends to focus on mysterious events, revenge, building tension through the use of suspense, and modern imaginings of traditional Japanese supernatural adversaries such as ghosts. K-horror usually has a unique style compared to American films. Many stories focus on psychological aspects of fear and suffering rather than explicit violence and gore, and they share many thematic elements with Japanese horror. One especially interesting aspect of both genres is their willingness to give the stories a downer ending where none of the protagonists survive and whatever forces arrayed against them are free to go on harming others, perhaps stronger than before.

WHY ARE THEY SCARY?

Japanese horror and Korean horror rely on the same elements as American and European horror, but the execution is different, perhaps because of cultural differences. Someone raised in Japan or Korea has different social cues and anxieties to poke at than someone from America or Europe. The culture clash makes the outsider viewer feel out of place and confused; they wonder if the details being emphasized are important to the story or if it's just some kind of miscommunication.

Given that much of this kind of horror is about ghosts, and ghosts are prone to reacting if they are ignored or disrespected, it puts the participant on shaky ground, worried that they'll accidentally offend something and make themselves a target for its wrath. "I don't belong here" and "I shouldn't be here" are enough to cause stress and fear under the best of circumstances, and "I don't understand why this is happening" is likely to make them angry and defensive. When coupled with supernatural elements and an inability to escape to a safe and comfortable place, it puts the character a hair's breadth away from a fight-or-flight reflex. Add to this the Westerner's unfamiliarity with Japanese and Korean ghosts and other monsters, and you have PCs who are in over their heads and don't know the weaknesses of their opponents.

HORROR MODULES

- Character Posse
- Dead All Along
- Hallucination Reset
- Instant Panic
- Madness
- Shock
- Unease

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Risks

Players may feel a cultural disconnection with the environment of the game and not be quite as engaged as they would with a more familiar setting and presentation. Use the "sit down for a video" suggestion in the next section to overcome this.

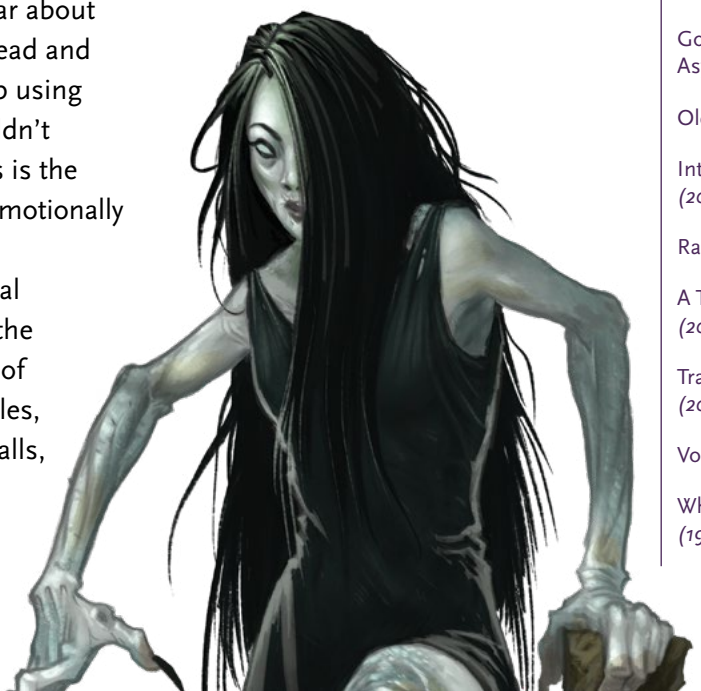
Some players may not want to play a no-win scenario or may be disappointed when all of the PCs fail to escape the horror of the situation. If this seems likely for your group, inform them ahead of time that the goal of this kind of game is not to win but to unfold a mystery and have a scary experience.

Making J- and K-Horror Scary in Your Game

Because these kinds of stories often end up in a death spiral where secondary and primary characters are haunted, cursed, or dead, you can let each player control multiple characters in the story (the Character Posse module) so that even if one of them is unable to continue, the player can keep participating in the game. This also allows you to remove some of these characters in surprising and shocking ways and let the other characters see or hear about it, increasing their sense of dread and panic. Unlike the normal setup using this method, the players shouldn't know which of their characters is the primary one, so they become emotionally invested in all of them.

These genres use weird visual and auditory cues to unnerve the participants. Find a collection of odd background noises (crackles, bells, dripping water, animal calls, death rattles, and so on) and create an ongoing soundtrack or play them intermittently to surprise the players. Find appropriate disturbing images (weird pale faces with dark eyes and black hair, dark dangerous water, high-contrast photos of strange locations, and so on) and leave them in the room as decorations, hand them out randomly as props, insert them into otherwise normal images, and put them on character sheets.

Because these genres tend to have a strong synthesis of sensory elements, you can build an eerie atmosphere for the game by first having the players sit down for a quiet showing of an appropriate spooky genre film in a dark room. You could even create a cut of moody scenes from various sources strung together without context—like a suspenseful tracking shot, a strange dialogue scene about a haunting, someone entering a scary place, a jump scare, and a dream sequence. The intent is to let your players sink into the feelings and thoughts of the sort of horror experience you want them to have, and since J- and K-horror are largely psychological, you need to give them an almost-meditative experience to prompt them into taking that journey with their characters.



J- or K-horror GM intrusion: *A PC sees an eerie ghost or monster rise up behind another character, but as soon as the PC calls out or takes an action, the creature vanishes. Nobody else saw it.*

Character Posse, page 85

J-Horror Inspiration

Confessions *(2010 film)*

Cure *(1997 film)*

Dark Water *(2002 film)*

House *(1977 film)*

Kwaidan *(1964 film)*

Ju-On: The Grudge *(2002 film)*

Pulse *(2001 film)*

Real Onigokko or Tag *(2015 film)*

Ring *(1998 film)*

K-Horror Inspiration

The Wailing *(2016 film)*

Gonjiam: Haunted Asylum *(2018 film)*

Oldboy *(2003 film)*

Into the Mirror *(2003 film)*

Rampant *(2018 film)*

A Tale of Two Sisters *(2003 film)*

Train to Busan *(2016 film)*

Voice *(2005 film)*

Whispering Corridors *(1998 film)*

guilherme cosenza (Order - 26776915)

Children bring beloved toys to life with their imaginations and take them on journeys through make-believe. Some toys aren't so lucky and exist only to be twisted and chewed, or they absorb the negativity from a toxic home environment, eventually gaining the will to move on their own and strike out at those who hurt them. Some killer toys pursue innocent children (perhaps to possess them and live as humans), and others protect children with misguided attacks against abusive parents. Neither kind ever grows up, which means they get passed from family to family in a cycle of murder and abandonment.

Instead of Dead All Along being about realizing that you're a ghost, it might be about realizing that you were turned into a toy.

The monsters from Gremlins *aren't toys, but they are dangerous, tiny things that arise from a cute pet given to a child, so we can stretch our "killer toy" definition to include them here.*

Why Are They Scary?

Killer toys arise from childhood fears of the dark, overactive imaginations, and misrecognition of facial features. A clown or doll that is innocuous during the day becomes monstrous and weird when it stares from across the room at midnight. An impish grin might look like a pained grimace when you see it out of the corner of your eye. The moonlight makes action figures appear sinister and plush animals seem like alien flesh covered in reaching spores. A child who is rough with their toys every day might begin to fear that the toys will want to play rough with them. Adults fight a constant battle for the toys not to be left out where people will trip on them, and the things seem to have an uncanny knack for ending up underfoot, leading to resentment. And, of course, adults aren't immune to seeing weird shapes in the half light and remembering their own abandoned toys.

If you have old toys or action figures that you don't mind destroying, you can represent damage to toys in the game by pulling the limbs off the real toys at the table. Paper doll printouts also work for this idea.

Killer toy GM intrusion: *Half of a killer toy that has been destroyed reanimates as a level 2 creature with all of the original's special abilities.*

Horror Modules

- Bad Penny
- Dead All Along
- Ghostly Helpers
- Hallucination Reset
- Instant Panic
- Poor Choices
- Unease

Risks

It's easy for a horror game with killer toys to veer into silliness and horror comedy or black comedy. That's okay, as the films in this genre tend to use dark humor as well (because honestly, full-sized people getting killed by toys is a funny concept). If the game gets more comedic than you intended, you can push the situation back to horror by adding a dangerous GM intrusion so the players remember that their characters are in trouble even if the players think it's a funny encounter.

If your players are children, a scenario where toys come to life and attack them might be traumatic. The same could be said for children in the area who overhear the game. Be aware of your surroundings.

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Making Killer Toys Scary in Your Game

Although they're small, killer toys are more ferocious and tough than living creatures their size, and they probably don't feel pain. A typical killer toy should be a significant threat to an adult, but still vulnerable to attacks that take advantage of their small size and limited strength (such as being thrown across the room). They usually have a special ability relating to their purpose as a toy, such as gliding, blinding with a laser, choking with a projectile weapon, or tripping with a pull-string or sharp component piece (or dice).

Killer toys work with other toys (even nonsentient toys) for greater effect. When they're not launching water balloons or rapid-fire foam darts, they're sending windup toys down the hall as a distraction or starting a noisy videogame to cover for their own sounds. They'll use other toys as mounts, vehicles, or booby traps. Because the humans don't know which toys are animate and which are inert, a killer toy will leave harmless toys in odd places to startle and confuse their prey—especially if the killer toy is one that has multiple costumes that fit other toys in the house. Give a clever toy a couple of hours to prepare the area for its attack, and the humans will be hard-pressed to get out alive.

Toys know the ins and outs of the house they live in. They know where the steak knives are kept, how to turn on the hot water and the stove, where the circuit breakers are, and where the family members charge their phones. They'll use this awareness to stack the odds against their human adversaries and create an environment more favorable for them to win.

You can put toys all around the gaming area—some out in the open, some hidden for players to find later. It's more effective if the toys are old, damaged, or outright broken; try swap meets, garage sales, and the bottom of a kid's toy bin to find ones with missing limbs, scratched eyes, and half-erased marker drawings.

Learn the catchphrases and commercial jingles for various toys, and have the toys use them as a lead-up to their attacks. Just to be creepy, killer toys might use magnetic letters, cards from word games, and digital recorder toys to leave threatening messages for people to find.

Decide why the toys are alive and give the PCs clues they can figure out. Is it a dark magic ritual that put the soul of a murderer into a doll? Is it angry ghosts or a demon that can only animate small things? Computer chips gone haywire? Give the PCs the opportunity to end the threat by doing something other than smashing every toy in the house.

Typical killer toy: *level 4, stealth as level 5; health 12; Might defense against grappling, roughhousing, and throwing as level 1*

Killer toy GM intrusion: *A killer toy cleverly escapes something that should be able to imprison it (like locking it in a trunk).*

Killer toy GM intrusion: *A killer toy uses a yet-to-be-recalled accessory as an attack, inflicting +2 points of damage.*

Killer Toy Inspiration

Child's Play *(1988 film franchise)*

"Creepy Doll" (2006 Jonathan Coulton song)

Gremlins *(1984 film franchise)*

Krampus *(2015 film)*

Magic *(1978 film)*

Poltergeist *(1982 film)*

Tales From the Hood *(1995 film)*

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Author H.P. Lovecraft created a background mythos for his fiction populated with ancient alien species and cosmic beings that predate humanity and live outside our concepts of good and evil. His creations live in a universe that is vast, inhospitable, and uncaring, and the entirety of humanity's accomplishments and existence is insignificant and inconsequential. These godlike beings are so monstrous and immense that a human achieving even a small understanding of them would go mad, and with a thought they could obliterate anyone who somehow gains their attention.

Doomed, page 44

Mad, page 51

Mythos GM intrusion: *A depleted cypher or artifact can be used another time, but its function changes, it must be deciphered again, and using it costs sanity.*

WHY IS IT SCARY?

Humans think very highly of themselves and their civilization, but when confronted by entities of the mythos, humans tend to go mad with the sudden realization that humanity is insignificant compared to the accomplishments and abilities of these mortal and immortal creatures. Much like a jogger who accidentally runs off an unseen cliff, the shocking transition between utter confidence and inevitable death creates visceral and cerebral dread that stretches a few seconds of falling into a long moment of useless flailing in a futile attempt to reverse course before hitting the bottom. The mythos is true nihilism—not the abstract belief of philosophers, but a concrete understanding that your entire life, species, and civilization is utterly meaningless. If you oppose the mythos, you can't win, you can't tie—you can only hope to slow the descent into madness for a short while.

Mythos GM intrusion: *A character becomes aware of a personal connection to a horrifying aspect of the mythos (such as being related to deep ones, recognizing a friend trapped in a mi-go brain case, and so on). They take Intellect damage and are stunned for one round.*

Mythos GM intrusion: *A character develops amnesia or a phobia relating to something in their immediate environment or a recent trauma.*

HORROR MODULES

- Character Posse
- Fragility
- Hysteria
- Instant Panic
- Madness (especially combined with the Doomed and Mad descriptors)
- Perilous Venture
- Poor Choices
- Possession
- Shock
- Unease

RISKS

The mythos is well known in gamer culture, but many players don't fully understand the fatalistic nature of this genre. They might treat Lovecraftian creatures like deep ones just like any other monster, and when their characters start to fail, they may become upset and think the game session is rigged against them. If they're inexperienced with this genre, explain it beforehand and let them know you're running a session using the mythos so the players know how their characters should react.

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Making the Mythos Scary in Your Game

The PCs are driven to uncover secrets and unlock mysteries, but everything they learn is both an achievement and a terror. Ancient ruins hold valuable treasures but are guarded or inhabited by things humanity should remain ignorant of. The treasures are cursed or unlock horrific things in the bearer's mind or doorways to dimensions of madness. The PCs take risks trying to use items they don't understand, but trying to understand those things better comes at a cost.

Show (through actions of NPCs and events in the story) that the actions of the PCs are small and insignificant in the scheme of the universe. This might be something that only happens at the end of the scenario, or a progression of small realizations that build toward a conclusion. Important NPCs might die off camera, leaving the PCs without useful information they needed. Agents of the mythos reclaim items that fell into the characters' hands. Whatever the PCs are trying to stop is merely a small part of a larger destruction happening all over the world.

Make the PCs feel distrustful of everyone around them (except, probably, the other PCs, as infighting often detracts from the horror experience). Strangers give them suspicious looks. People they know make them feel unwelcome. Anyone might have nefarious motives or alliances. Neutral NPCs act erratically or go insane, perhaps dying at the hands of the characters under strange circumstances.

Safety is an illusion. Even in a presumably normal human city, there are forces at work that will align themselves against the PCs, trying to steal their discoveries, abduct them for dark rituals, or merely maim or kill them. There are terrifying things waiting to be discovered in the shadows, or just beyond a narrow dimensional veil that the PCs can't perceive.

Magic and alien technology are unreliable and dangerous. Even a helpful item may have a subtle and horrible side effect that builds up over time. Any new secret or discovery learned is a new opportunity for danger to find the PCs, either in the form of cultists who want what they've learned or a direct threat from the knowledge itself.

In addition to subtle cyphers, a Lovecraftian game should use manifest cyphers, whether their source is technological, magical, or a mix. Strange amulets, half-deciphered scrolls and tomes, enchanted weapons, fragments of bizarre statues, jewelry or musical instruments from alien worlds, and exotic substances native to abnormal dimensions all can have incredible powers if used the right way.

Subtle Cyphers, page 378

Manifest Cyphers, page 379

Lovecraftian Inspiration

At the Mountains of Madness *(1936 Lovecraft novella)*

"The Call of Cthulhu" (1928 Lovecraft short story)

Call of Cthulhu *(RPG, various versions)*

"The Colour Out of Space" (1927 Lovecraft short story)

"The Dunwich Horror" (1929 Lovecraft short story)

Hellboy *(1994 comic franchise; 2004 film)*

The Shadow Out of Time *(1936 Lovecraft novella)*

The Shadow Over Innsmouth *(1936 Lovecraft novella)*

The Whisperer in Darkness *(1931 Lovecraft novella)*

Lovecraftian Creatures

Nightgaunt, page 114

Shoggoth, page 116

Lovecraftian Creatures

Deep one, page 319

Ghoul, page 332

Killing white light, page 340

Mi-go, page 342

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"Machines" as a horror genre include murderous AIs in a virtual environment (or the internet) and cyborgs that think like machines despite their biological parts.

Machine GM intrusion: *A machine destroyed by a melee attack explodes like a grenade. The metallic shrapnel inflicts 5 points of damage on every creature in immediate range.*

Machine GM intrusion: *The machine snatches an important piece of mechanical or electronic equipment from a character and uses it against them as part of the same action.*

Modern life surrounds us with machines—they take us to work and back, supply electrical power to our civilization, provide us with entertainment. Advanced machines manufacture items in factories and fly explosives to targets in war zones. We rely on them to work for us, but there's always the risk that they'll break down or malfunction just when we need them.

WHY ARE THEY SCARY?

Dramatic leaps in technology have always suffered a counter-reaction of fear and traditionalism. Even as personal computers became commonplace, many people still feared them, with terminology like "crashes" and "viruses" making computers seem more dangerous than they actually were. The government and private corporations can listen in on our mobile phone conversations and through devices hooked up to the internet. Smartphone apps can turn spoken words into text, meaning that machines are learning our language. Efficient automation is replacing the need for human employees, and self-driving cars are being tested on city streets (sometimes with injurious results), which means that people fear losing work to machines and are at risk of being killed by an automated car suffering a software (and hardware) crash. Most users don't understand how far technology still has to go before we get true artificial intelligence, but it's easy to look at these various components—rogue programs, surveillance apps, robots that replace human workers, and self-aware machines—and worry that the machines will turn against us.

Machines don't have emotions or loyalty. They're used to humans treating them as disposable and are ready to answer in kind, and that's assuming their programming or perception attributes any special qualities to humans or living things. For example, a garbage-hauling robot that compresses trash into cubes may not understand the difference between vegetation, food scraps, and people. Most machines don't care that they're killing people. They don't feel pity and don't react to begging.

Even if we programmed benevolent or protective concepts into machines, those programs can be changed by hostile entities, errors, or potentially the machines themselves (especially if they're programmed to learn). If a robot's programming uses a reward/punishment system for making decisions, it would be possible to alter a robot into the equivalent of a psychopath that gets digital pleasure whenever it kills a human.

HORROR MODULES

- Hallucination Reset
- Hysteria
- Instant Panic
- Ironman
- Poor Choices
- Secret Twist (secretly a machine)
- Unease

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RISKS

Machines have a couple of Achilles' heels in that they require a power source and are vulnerable to electromagnetic pulses, and clever players will want to exploit these weaknesses. If the machines are smart enough, they'll have thought of these weaknesses and come up with a solution; otherwise, your goal for the scenario is to draw out the conflict so the PCs don't eliminate the threat too soon.

MAKING MACHINES SCARY IN YOUR GAME

Machines meant to do hard work (including industrial and soldier robots) are much stronger than humans, have specialized senses (including infrared, night vision, radar, or x-rays), and are able to focus on very precise parameters (such as cutting microscopic grooves at specific intervals or shooting through a keyhole). Basically, machines are built to be really good at one or two specific things, so when designing a robot, you can give it one or two exceptional modifications relating to its specialties, such as letting it attack or break things at two levels above its base level. Machines are usually equipped with tools appropriate to their main function, such as lasers, diamond-bladed grinders, and tanks of welding gas, and their attacks will usually repurpose these items to great effect.

Robots that work in hazardous environments often have armor plating and shielded components to protect their more delicate mechanisms, so it's common for a machine to have at least 1 point of Armor, with combat-oriented models typically having 3 points.

Machines that face a lot of wear and tear may have self-repairing functions or assistant robots that take care of these repairs for them (if the technology is sufficiently advanced, these assistants might be invisible nanobots), healing the machine every round.

Attacks that target biological systems, such as diseases and poisons, should have no effect on most machines. An intelligent machine can use that to its advantage, such as by flooding a room with tear gas. A robot chassis has a broader tolerance for cold and heat, which makes encounters in the artic or desert interesting.

Although most robots in a scenario might be nearly identical, the master machine should have additional features and abilities, or be able to adapt and rebuild itself in the middle of combat to counter a tactic the PCs use. The master machine might be visibly larger and more impressive than its soldiers, or it might try to blend in among the rest and only reveal itself at the right moment. If the machines operate on a network, it may be possible for the master to directly control the actions of the others, or it may operate as a collective intelligence or have the ability to jump its consciousness to any node in the network, making it very difficult to eliminate the leader as long as multiple robots remain.

Decide if the machines have a goal and a plan, or if they are mostly acting randomly or targeting any hostiles they encounter due to corrupted programming. Either option can be scary, but it's more scary if the PCs understand what is happening.

Machine GM intrusion: *The machine's attack also injures one of the character's limbs (such as tearing a muscle or breaking a bone) if they fail a Might defense roll, inflicting 6 points of lasting damage.*

Lasting damage, page 436

A machine's central computer might be more vulnerable to heat, giving the PCs short-term options for using the environment to their advantage.

Machine and Robot Inspiration

Battlestar Galactica *(2004 TV series)*

"The Best of Both Worlds" (1990 Star Trek: The Next Generation *episode)*

The Black Hole *(1979 film)*

Ex Machina *(2014 film)*

The Matrix *(1999 film franchise)*

Maximum Overdrive *(1986 film)*

Screamers *(1995 film)*

The Terminator *(1984 film)*

Terminator 2: Judgment Day *(1991 film)*

Virtuosity *(1995 film)*

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The iconic mummy of horror is a preserved and reanimated Egyptian corpse, wrapped in linen and pursuing those who looted its tomb of treasures. The allure of mummies is a combination of death, curses, ancient relics, and decadent rulers.

Although this section focuses on Egypt, there are many other places where deliberate or accidental mummification has occurred—Australia, China, Italy, Lebanon, Mexico, the Philippines, and so on.

The idea of an ancient Egyptian living on as a mummy or reincarnating through the centuries is a creation of Hollywood. The scarier aspects of this monster derive from this sensational origin rather than any authentic cultural source, and this discussion pertains only to fictional mummies. Intelligent mummies in horror usually move like living people, speak, adapt to modern clothes and customs, and act more like sorcerers than mindless monsters.

Truth be told, if someone breaks into your tomb to take your stuff (or your body), it's okay to be angry at them, whether they're doing it for profit or to display in a museum.

Why Are They Scary?

Mummies literally are dead human bodies, and people fear them because of an aversion to being around corpses. Mummies that were poorly made or tampered with have a cadaverous or skeletal appearance. Even the most well-preserved Egyptian mummy has a dry, withered look that no living human has, making it obvious that they are dead people, whether they're resting inert in a sarcophagus or chasing after tomb robbers.

One unique quirk of mummies compared to vampires is that mummies often have their armor and weapons with them.

Mummies are vengeful and rather indiscriminate in who they include in their vengeance. Obviously tomb thieves deserve a mummy's wrath, but archaeologists are often their victims as well, and a mummy could kill hundreds of people in a nearby village as it attempts to catch its prey. A mummy might decide to punish the offspring of its enemies, which (given the number of generations that have passed) might run in the thousands and include people who never knew about the mummy's mortal identity or the "crimes" their ancestors supposedly committed against it.

Obviously, unwrapping a mummy and examining its interior is insensitive considering that it's a human body, and that Egyptians mummified people to protect these remains.

As powerful as their physical presence is, their greatest intangible power is a fearsome, long-reaching, and inevitable curse. Real-world archaeologists have experienced haunting visions of spectral beings, seen omens of cobras and jackals, or suffered untimely deaths (often in very odd circumstances), all of which have been attributed to mummy curses. Even if the PCs defeat a mummy or take things from a tomb without awakening it, they might be struck with bad luck, disease, or a painful death weeks or months later. Often the only way to remove the curse is to restore the stolen artifacts to their proper place—which, of course, puts the PCs back in the lair of the mummy, vulnerable to its physical presence.

Horror Modules

- Hysteria
- Instant Panic
- Last Survivor
- Poor Choices
- Secret Twist (PCs are the villains)
- Shock
- Unease

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Risks

If given a choice, players won't go into a tomb if they think they'll awaken a mummy or its curse, so don't give them a choice. Be clever about bringing the adventure to them in ways they'll be willing to engage with. Give their characters a strong motivation to enter the tomb, or start the adventure with the PCs already inside it. Have them encounter travelers who want to sell some mysterious treasures without revealing that they are tomb robbers and the mummy is already pursuing them—and now the PCs as well. Perhaps the PCs are the last remaining scions of a famous archaeologist, and the mummy's curse will catch up to them unless they find and return the stolen tomb loot. The characters might need to defend a village against a mummy's attacks. One PC might remember a past life as the mummy's nemesis or a member of a secret society that guards against the creature's return.

Making Mummies Scary in Your Game

Play up the supernatural aspects of the mummy—it's not just a brute monster, and it could have any priestly or sorcerous magic you think is appropriate. It doesn't need to breathe, so it is silent when it approaches and in between sentences. It's immortal, so it can afford to take its time to study its opponents, either through minions or using disguises. If a PC gets cursed, have them see a scarab-shaped brand on their skin or a mummy-like figure made of smoke.

The master mummy might use its decadently dressed mummified warriors or priests as decoys to trick intruders into thinking they fought the master, only to appear in person and strike down the weakest opponent.

Mummies have Armor; describe this as attacks harmlessly piercing their flesh in nonvital areas (such as where their internal organs have been replaced by fragrant spices), and they largely ignore anything that would cause a living creature pain. An interesting variant is to have the mummy be nearly invulnerable (extra Armor, regenerating health, and so on) as long as it carries a specific treasure, such as a weapon or amulet, and it weakens to its normal game stats only after that item is taken away or destroyed.

Decorate the gaming area with art or posters (such as hieroglyphs and tomb murals) that match the mummy's origins. Use mummy props and check aquarium stores for appropriate interesting items. Get or create a mummy costume out of strips of cloth and wear it while you GM. A scarab or ankh ring is a good visual reminder of the theme and might represent an in-game item. Use mummy, sarcophagus, or hieroglyph symbols to customize character sheets and handouts. Do the hidden mask trick with the mask of a mummy or sarcophagus. Play music that creates an eerie and ancient mood. Find recordings of an ancient language the mummy might know and play those clips when it speaks.

Most of the lifelike mummy characters shown in films were wrapped and buried alive as a punishment rather than wrapped, eviscerated, and properly mummified. Nice job, Hollywood.

Creatures that use artificial means to make their bodies immortal can also be considered mummies, even if they lack bandages. Instead of magic, their origin and powers may be due to science.

Hidden mask trick: see Making Clowns Scary in Your Game, page 45

When seeking out recordings, search for "speaking ancient Egyptian" or "sound of ancient Egyptian."

Mummy Inspiration

The Aztec Mummy/ La Momia Azteca *(1957 film)*

The Mummy *(1932 film)*

The Mummy *(1999 film franchise)*

The Mummy's Hand *(1940 film)*

Stargate *(1994 film)*

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If standard physics is the rule for the world we live in, science gone wrong or "mad science" breaks those rules in one or more areas. Artificial intelligence, clones (perhaps with the original's memories), invisibility, gene-spliced monsters, portals to other dimensions, regeneration, and telepathy are just a few examples of the weird things it can do. Mad science in horror is the application and consequences of a discovery, pushing those results to nightmarish extremes, and confronting those responsible. (If mad science happens to be the backstory of a horror game, that doesn't mean the game is *about* mad science.)

Weaponizing dreams and nightmares is definitely a mad science horror topic.

An easy way to get the PCs into the story is to have one of them be a former assistant to the mad scientist—someone who quit the project for ethical reasons and now wants to stop them.

WHY IS IT SCARY?

People fear what they don't understand. We live in an era where scientific ignorance is blatant, scammers peddle pseudoscience, and social media echo chambers exaggerate the dangers of GMOs, vaccines, and dihydrogen monoxide. Uneducated folks resent educated people (and their "elitism") and believe they know just as much about science as people who devote their entire lives to research. Blaming scientists for common misfortunes is at an all-time high, and people think mind-controlling "chemtrails" are a government plot, vaccines poison children and cause autism as a ploy by big pharma, and rogue scientists perform unethical and "unnatural" experiments for profit. Mad science as a horror genre plays up all these fears and the lingering doubts that even a reasonable person has about what's being crammed into our food, water, and environment.

Mad science GM intrusion: *A device or creature has an unanticipated reaction with a character or their equipment, hindering their actions or causing a harmless but disturbing mutation for a minute.*

Mad science GM intrusion: *A device or creature has an enhanced effect on a character and always acts as if two levels higher.*

Mad science GM intrusion: *One of the character's subtle cyphers becomes a manifest cypher with a form appropriate to the genre and type of mad science present.*

HORROR MODULES

- Hallucination Reset
- Hysteria
- Instant Panic
- Ironman
- Madness
- Perilous Venture
- Poor Choices
- Secret Twist (ally)
- Unease

RISKS

Audiences are pretty forgiving when it comes to sci fi and mad science as long as there's an attempt at a reasonable explanation for how it works. If you (as the GM) don't spend at least a few minutes thinking on the "why" of how the science works (alien tech, multiple dimensions, psychic-resonant gel, quantum foam, and so on), not only are you creating a scenario that has as much logic as "a wizard did it," you're missing out on the opportunity to drop hints for the players to discover and find creative ways to defeat the mad scientist's creation. Maybe the alien tech is fragile and vulnerable to biological contamination. The extradimensional power source collapses if there's too much uncertainty because of nearby radioactive decay. The psychic gel can be overwhelmed by strong positive

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emotions. Quantum foam becomes unstable if bombarded by x-rays.

Mad science can do anything you want it to, but—similar to a rule for science fiction—you should limit its scope to one or two breakthroughs. Otherwise, you're throwing everything and the kitchen sink into the scenario. For example, have the horror focus on portals to other dimensions, mutated clones, or psychic warfare, but not all three at the same time.

Making Mad Science Scary in Your Game

In some ways, mad science can be used to flavor another horror genre, but even on its own, it should work by a set of rules. If mad science is part of the story, put yourself in the mindset of an unscrupulous character with access to the scientific breakthrough and think about how the mad science and its rules impact four important things:

- Its creator (or user)
- The present events in the story
- The future
- The PCs

For example, a mind-controlling machine might be addictive to use or harm the user's sanity. The machine might be openly or secretly controlling an important NPC (with or without the creator's knowledge), maybe someone the PCs care about. If it has a range limitation or affects a limited number of targets, there may be a way to increase its capacity. A PC controlled by the machine will need to receive instructions on their role in the plan and what to do about the other characters.

Mad scientists always need test subjects. Often they start out by testing on animals (if only because it's cheaper and less likely to draw unwanted attention to zap rats and dogs instead of people). Once they're getting satisfactory results, they move on to see what effect their experiments have on humans. The ruined leftovers of these experiments can be horrifying in themselves and give the PCs more reason to challenge the scientist—or flee before they suffer the same fate.

Mad Science Inspiration

Altered States *(1980 film)*

The Black Hole *(1979 film)*

The Cell *(2000 film)*

The City of Lost Children *(1995 film)*

Dreamscape *(1984 film)*

Ex Machina *(2014 film)*

Forbidden Planet *(1956 film)*

The Fly (1986 film)

Frankenstein *(1818 Mary Shelley novel; 1931 film)*

"Herbert West—Reanimator" (1922 Lovecraft short story; 1985 film Re-Animator*)*

The Invisible Man *(1897 H. G. Wells novel; 1933 film)*

The Island of Doctor Moreau *(1896 H. G. Wells novel; 1977 film; 1996 remake)*

Scanners (1981 film)

Stranger Things *(2016 TV series)*

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Frankenstein's monster: see reanimated, page 115

A simulacrum is an independent living thing created with artificial methods by human hands and tools, such as Frankenstein's monster, an alchemist's homunculus servant, a human clone, or an embryo pieced together out of DNA from multiple sources (some of which might not be from the same species). Humans attempting to make simulacra are playing god, often using untested homemade techniques without fully comprehending the ethics, consequences, and potential faults of what they're doing. Whether their intent is to create a slave, a child, or a superior being, they risk upsetting the natural order. A simulacrum is a motherless child, something without true parents and lacking a true connection to any part of society.

Simulacra in horror share some traits with machines and robots, except that simulacra are biological living creatures. See machines and robots, page 66.

Simulacrum GM intrusion: *A character recognizes a trait or mannerism in the simulacrum—eyes, hands, and so on—that reminds them of themselves or someone they know, stunning them for one round.*

WHY ARE THEY SCARY?

Simulacra are examples of science (especially mad science) going too far without considering the ethics of doing so. They are aberrant biology, a manifestation of common fears about cancer, autoimmune disorders, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs). They are also a scapegoat for uneducated and anti-intellectual people who disbelieve or mistrust science—a resistance to that which is new and groundbreaking. For some, creation of life is solely the purview of Heaven, and any human attempt to create life will inevitably result in a soulless monster that is destined for Hell—and perhaps an easy tool of evil on Earth.

Simulacrum GM intrusion: *A character develops an intrusive psychic connection with the creature, easing all hostile actions against each other.*

Simulacrum GM intrusion: *A creature (whether or not it seems human) does something in an especially humanlike and natural way, filling its opponents with guilt and sympathy, hindering their next action against it by two steps.*

A sci fi twist on this genre is shown in the film *Gattaca*, where eugenics is the norm and unmodified humans are viewed as aberrations prone to defects and disease. In a game, the PCs might be unmodified humans or have to hunt down unmodified criminals (reversing the concept of *Blade Runner*), making the players deal with the psychological horror of *humans* being the weak, diseased monsters of the setting.

HORROR MODULES

- Character Posse
- Last Survivor
- Secret Twist (you've switched with your simulacrum)
- Shock
- Unease

RISKS

Players are so familiar with Frankenstein's monster as a concept and the idea of transplanting organs and tissue from one person to another that the monster's surgical origin has lost much of its shock value, and the creature is just an adversary to overcome. The awareness and acceptance of genetic engineering to fight diseases has likewise become mainstream, lessening the mental impact of a "lab monster." To make the players feel the horror of a simulacrum's existence, give the PCs a strong emotional connection to the creature so they can empathize with it. Alternatively, confront the PCs with the unsavory

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methods used to bring the creature into existence.

Making Simulacra Scary in Your Game

If the simulacrum is unique, it is therefore alone in the world, so give a PC a lonely or isolated backstory so they can identify with the suffering of the creature. If the creature was rejected by its creators, give a PC a backstory of being orphaned or abandoned as a child so they understand what it's going through (even as the PCs hunt it down). If the simulacrum is made up of human parts (either finished parts or DNA), have a PC recognize components in the creature (such as an unusual eye color, tattoo, voice, or familial resemblance to a person known to the character) so the PC understands its humanity and the sacrifices made to bring it to life.

One aspect of a simulacrum story is a temporary change—for example, something was made more intelligent than normal, but without ongoing treatment it will revert to its more primitive self. As the PCs pursue the creature, give them opportunities to observe it grappling with what is effectively dementia and amnesia. Its physical form might also degrade, with the creature growing tumors or sloughing off rejected parts as its suppressed immune system battles with its patchwork flesh.

Even if the completed creature is perfect, there might have been failures along the way. Present the PCs with evidence of these failures—body parts that rotted before they could be transplanted, monstrosities preserved in jars, records of unethical experiments on people and animals, samples illegally taken from corpses or patients (perhaps even the PCs), and so on. Make them loathe the process and the creators as much as or more than the creation itself.

Remember that a simulacrum doesn't have to be a human creature, and that some players have more empathy toward animals than they do toward humans. Science or alchemy could create monster dogs, insects, dinosaurs, or some other kind of animal that doesn't understand why its very existence is pain and fear, and why it is being chased. If the creature has been altered to have near-human intelligence, it may question why it was made, why other creatures of its kind act like animals, and whether its fate is to die a prisoner or live as an experimental subject.

In a game where building simulacra is commonplace, someone might make a creature for the specific purpose of terrorizing the PCs, such as an assassin who looks like a dead spouse or child, a stalker who looks like an abusive parent, or a shambling thing that looks like their pets and family members fused together.

In The Hunger Games, *the government creates dog-like creatures with the eyes and voices of fallen human tributes in order to traumatize the surviving competitors.*

Simulacrum Inspiration

Alien Resurrection *(1997 film)*

"The Architects of Fear" (1963 The Outer Limits *episode)*

Blade Runner *(1982 film)*

The Bride *(1985 film)*

Frankenstein *(1818 Mary Shelley novel; 1931 film)*

Gattaca *(1997 film)*

The Hunger Games *(2008 Suzanne Collins novel; film trilogy)*

The Island of Doctor Moreau *(1896 H. G. Wells novel; 1977 film; 1996 remake)*

Isolation *(2005 film)*

The Rocky Horror Picture Show *(1975 film)*

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This genre entry focuses on fictional slasher-movie killers rather than real-life serial killers and spree killers, whose acts are especially depraved and often beyond the consent boundaries of players.

The success of the classical era of slasher films (1974–1984) was probably aided by television news programs sharing information about real serial killers in the 70s and 80s.

Slasher GM intrusion: *The dead killer turns out to be someone else disguised as the killer.*

Slasher GM intrusion: *A moment after the killer is slain, their body can't be found—they're probably still alive.*

Slasher GM intrusion: *The "dead" killer is actually a PC who was dressed as the killer. The real killer is pretending to be that PC and waiting for a chance to attack the others.*

Machines and robots, page 66

A murderous maniac pursues a group of people, usually teenagers, hunting them down one by one and killing them in gruesome ways, usually wielding a signature weapon while remaining anonymous behind a fear-inducing mask or costume. What the killer lacks in speed, they make up for in tenacity and a near-immortal streak that allows them to outlast a long list of victims—often through multiple sequels.

WHY ARE THEY SCARY?

A slasher's motive is simple: to kill, and that threat is understandable to anyone, more so than the idea of being possessed by a ghost or eaten by a monster in the woods. The slasher is a direct threat.

Slashers usually make themselves look scary. Whether they wear a creepy Halloween mask, clown makeup, or a hockey mask, or their face is covered in burns from a fire that nearly killed them, they're intended (either by the author of the story, or by the slasher as a creepy persona) to unnerve you with their appearance.

Slashers are heartless or even emotionless. They don't care that they're killing people. They may even enjoy it. Their lack of empathy makes them much like machines—they can't be bargained with or reasoned with, and begging for your life won't make them stop. A normal person can potentially imagine killing someone by accident or in a heightened emotional state, but the idea of coldly choosing to kill someone seems inhuman and shows how the slasher is disturbed and wrong inside.

HORROR MODULES

- Character Posse
- Ghostly Helpers
- Hysteria
- Ironman
- Last Survivor
- Poor Choices
- Secret Twist (switched with the killer; you are the killer)
- Unease

RISKS

Slashers are a very simple horror genre—pursue, scare, kill, repeat. The villain doesn't need to have much of a motive, and in a film it's usually not important for the characters to even know what that motive is. In an RPG, players can feel disconnected from the point of the game if they don't know the villain's motive, much like playing through a mindless dungeon crawl where their only motivation is loot. Make sure that the players find clues as to why the slasher is hunting them or some kind of reveal about the slasher's backstory, such as a newspaper article pasted to the wall of a shed, an old family photo with a PC as an infant and an older child they don't remember at all, or a glimpse of the slasher's special forces tattoo that's strangely familiar to one worn by an ex-military character.

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Making Slashers Scary in Your Game

Pick a type of location that you personally know well. Find an excuse to get the PCs to that spot, give them a reason why they can't leave, and have the slasher chase them through that area. Your familiarity with that place can explain all sorts of jump scares, dead ends, and locked doors. Slasher in a college dorm. Slasher in a carnival. At a ren faire. In a hay maze. A museum. A mega-yacht. A decommissioned battleship. To make it more exciting, throw in a hazard that forces the PCs to move or obliterates part of the available area—a tornado passing through, a large fire, or flooding—to change the parameters of the chase and add new, dangerous elements to areas the characters already visited and perhaps considered safe.

Hang prop versions of common slasher weapons on the wall of your game room (but be sure they're safe plastic props in case someone tries to swing one around as a joke). If you can't get props like those, make some out of cardboard—a fire axe, a chainsaw, a big hook, a glove with claws, and so on. If you can, position one behind each player so it's in the background any time someone looks at them.

If your slasher wears a mask, get one like it and use it as a prop. If you're willing to commit to it, wear the mask while the slasher is present or nearby. Get or print extra masks to use as additional props, or make a bunch of them and hide them around the game room and in other places that will surprise the players (like the silverware drawer and inside the microwave). Put a picture of the mask on the back of the character sheets.

Make a playlist with tracks from slasher movie soundtracks, mix in some chainsaw and weapon noises, and play it at low volume for the entire game. There are apps with scary sounds that have many noises just a tap away (including chainsaws, heartbeats, and screams) that you can use to augment a jump scare or an attack by the slasher.

Instead of having the players write XP awards on their character sheets, use cards with weapons on them, tokens in the shape of weapons, or cards or tokens of the slasher's mask or face (horror and slasher collector cards and sticker packs also work for this).

Figure out your slasher's signature look or emote—this might be something like Freddie Krueger's sneer, Michael Myers's stiff posture, or Norman Bates's awkward stabbing. Practice this. When your slasher appears, use that look or emote every time it fits the situation.

Slasher GM intrusion: *The "dead" killer gets back up for one last attack.*

Slasher GM intrusion: *The killer shrugs off what should be a mortal wound or heals 10 health.*

Slasher Inspiration

A Nightmare on Elm Street *(1984 film)*

Alien *(1979 film)*

Friday the 13th *(1980 film)*

Halloween *(1978 film)*

Psycho *(1960 film)*

Scream *(1996 film)*

The Texas Chain Saw Massacre *(1974 film)*

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"Man vs. nature" is literally one of the defined types of narrative conflict.

"There are some dogs which, when you meet them, remind you that, despite thousands of years of man-made evolution, every dog is still only two meals away from being a wolf."
—Good Omens

The classic tale referenced here is not Cujo, *but* Old Yeller. *You know, a story for kids.*

Survival horror GM intrusion: *Some supplies are ruined, lost, or contaminated—a water flask has a leak, food starts to rot, a safety rope snaps.*

Survival horror GM intrusion: *The weather starts to get better, then suddenly gets harsher than it was before.*

Survival horror GM intrusion: *A character finds extra water or food, extending their resources, but it wasn't safe to consume and the character gets sick later (hindering all actions for several hours).*

For being the dominant species on the planet, humans are remarkably fragile when pitted directly against other animals or against nature itself. We're killed by lions, snakes, even tiny spiders, and we choose to live in places where it's possible to freeze to death or die of heat exhaustion by being outside at the wrong time. We cluster together in tight quarters, making it easy for diseases to hop from person to person. Survival horror stems from the threats of the natural world; we don't need demons, ghosts, or werewolves to frighten us, for the earth itself is filled with dangerous real creatures, freak weather, and deadly obstacles.

WHY IS IT SCARY?

We domesticated wolves and bred them into lap dogs, we keep all sorts of weird animals as pets, and we visit zoos or go on safaris, yet we're still aware that animals have instincts (and sometimes training) that makes them willing to bite, claw, and kill human beings. We have winter and summer clothes that keep us comfortable in all seasons, and even our homes are heated or cooled by technology, but a blizzard or a heat wave can shut down a city and kill dozens of infirm or unprepared people. Earthquakes, tornados, wildfires, and hurricanes can strike randomly and kill easily. In other words, even as we arrogantly assume we are the dominant species on the planet, deep down we're aware that we're a small part of a vast ecological machine that can randomly wipe out individuals at any time. There are news reports every week of people dying because of animals, severe weather, or outbreaks of communicable diseases like Ebola or measles.

The fact that mutations, climate change, and crossbreeding can turn a normal animal into something dangerous gives survival horror an unpredictable spike. Direct human action along these lines (such as a government lab trying to weaponize smallpox) only makes this worse, and without having to invoke mad science. Even children know that nature is cruel because they've read or watched the classic tale of rabies turning a beloved pet into a dangerous beast. Pollen allergies, gluten sensitivity, food poisoning, and sunburn are common reminders that the world around us is casually hostile to human life.

HORROR MODULES

- Character Posse
- Fragility
- Hallucination Reset
- Ironman
- Last Survivor
- Poor Choices

RISKS

Of all the kinds of horror described in this book, this is probably the most realistic, and some players—especially those who like to camp or hike—might feel some of these elements hit too close to home and poke at their

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actual fears. Always be aware of player consent.

As you prepare to run a survival horror scenario, keep an eye on world news leading up to the game. A real-life situation where people die from animal attacks, weather, or a disease outbreak is a tragedy, and running a game when that incident is fresh in everyone's mind is in exceptionally poor taste.

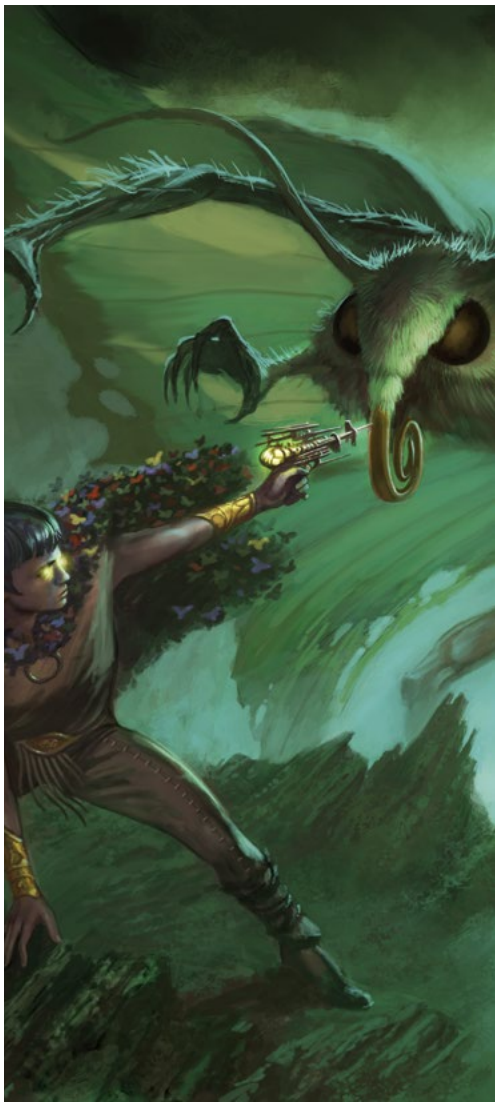
Making Survival Horror Scary in Your Game

Survival horror is strongly based in real-life scenarios, so reminding the players of normal human limitations can help keep the game tension high. Survival experts use a simple "rule of three": a typical person can survive three minutes without oxygen, three hours without shelter in harsh weather, three days without water, and three weeks without food. Put the PCs into situations where they have to meet or exceed these limits and make them come up with creative ways to extend their supplies.

You can mirror the suffering of the PCs for the players in subtle ways. If the characters are at risk of dying of thirst or starvation, forbid drinks or food at the game. If you know the PCs will be able to scrounge certain kinds of food during the game (such as grasshoppers), provide that food or a similar-looking substitute for the players. If the PCs are in a cold or hot environment, play in an area that's especially cold or warm. Use natural background noises to represent the weather the PCs are experiencing and animal sounds for whatever they're fighting or running from.

Cryptids

Cryptids are animals that some people believe to exist, based only on anecdotal (or otherwise insufficient) evidence. Examples include Bigfoot, bunyips, chupacabras, the Jersey devil, the Loch Ness monster, the Mothman, and yeti. Because dangerous "encounters" with these creatures are much like animal encounters, this book includes cryptids as part of the survival horror genre unless the specific creature has a more obvious connection to another category (such as aliens or demons).



Some players may not be able to abstain from food or drink for medical reasons.

Make sure what you're providing is safe to eat. Just because the PCs are scrounging leaves and pine needles doesn't mean that random leaves from your yard are edible.

Survival Horror Inspiration

127 Hours *(2010 film)*

Arachnophobia *(1990 film)*

The Birds *(1963 film)*

Contagion *(2011 film)*

Cujo *(1981 Stephen King novel; 1983 film)*

The Day After Tomorrow *(2004 film)*

Gravity *(2013 film)*

Jaws *(1975 film)*

The Martian *(2011 Andy Weir novel; 2015 film)*

Open Water *(2003 film)*

The Revenant *(2015 film)*

The Stand *(1978 Stephen King novel)*

"Survivor Type" (1982 Stephen King short story)

"To Build a Fire" (1908 Jack London short story)

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Immortal creatures that are stronger and faster than any human, vampires often have weird supernatural abilities, and may be seductively attractive or monstrously hideous. They feed on human blood, turn humans into vampires, and embody eroticism, eternal devotion, predatory stalking, and the dangers of the night.

Hideous vampires aren't a metaphor for sexual predation; they're more of a metaphor for the murderous "beast" that lives in the heart of humankind.

WHY ARE THEY SCARY?

Vampires are sexy, erotic beings. They charm with words, hypnotize with supernatural power, and plant kisses on their victim's neck, only to bite them and drink their blood. They're a metaphor for sexual predation—someone who flatters, romances, and seduces, but their actual goal is selfishness and violence. In some stories, this bite is painful, but in others it brings ecstasy—the victim's own body betraying them into submitting to the predator. Their power is about establishing and breaking trust.

As a mislead, set the game in a different part of the world (like Chile or Vietnam) so the players expect non-European vampire tropes, but the antagonist is actually a European vampire who moved there to prey on people unfamiliar with how to kill its kind.

The blood is the life. Humans have an instinctive reaction to the sight of blood and know that if they lose too much, they'll die. The idea that a vampire feeds on blood, the vital essence of life, is fascinating and simultaneously horrifying—they're a threat like cannibals or zombies, but without the messiness of disembowelment. The fact that a vampire often returns to the same victim several days in a row adds to the horror, for the victim knows the vampire will be back for more and the victim will be even more helpless to stop them.

Vampire GM intrusion: *The vampire ignores an attack from something it was supposed to be vulnerable to. Turns out the stories were wrong, or it came prepared for that sort of attack.*

Vampires turn their victims into other vampires, so the longer it takes to eliminate a vampire, the more creatures it has as guards. Friends and family members are made into the undead under the command of their creator, so a vampire hunter has to kill people they knew in life in order to get to the source of the threat. Indeed, many vampires count on this as an added layer of protection, choosing people their enemies love so the hunter is worn down by the emotional weight of killing friends.

Vampire GM intrusion: *The characters kill what they believed to be the master vampire, only for the real master vampire to finally make an appearance.*

HORROR MODULES

- Character Posse
- Ghostly Helpers
- Hysteria
- Instant Panic
- Ironman
- Madness
- Poor Choices
- Shock
- Unease

RISKS

Vampires are such a classic horror monster and part of human scare culture that in some ways they lose their scary impact. Everybody knows their strengths and weaknesses and can prepare for a vampire attack at the first hint that there's a bloodsucker in the neighborhood, which diminishes how scary they should be. One solution is to use the premise that the people in the game world have never heard of

Vampire GM intrusion: *A hostile friend-turned-vampire reverts to its human appearance and begs to be cured of its condition, making a character hesitate for a round and take no actions.*

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vampires (much in the same way that characters in horror films apparently have never seen a horror film and don't know their choices will get them killed). Another is to carefully choose which aspects of vampire lore apply to the game and which are misconceptions, fabrications by Hollywood, or rumors circulated by actual vampires to trick would-be hunters. Given that vampires (and creatures like them) from cultures all over the world and various fictional sources have a library of abilities and weaknesses to choose from, you can create a vampire for your game that is unique, interesting, and beyond what your players can predict.

Making Vampires Scary in Your Game

The master vampire shouldn't just be a brute (although lesser vampires and vampire minions can be). They should be versatile and clever. Give the vampire an interesting offensive ability (like fear or hypnosis), a defensive ability (like retreating from a fight as a bat or mist), and a utilitarian ability (like empowering minions or creating illusions). This gives the vampire options when stalking prey, defending its lair, and interfering with the plans of the PCs.

Remember that vampires are immortal, which makes them patient. They shouldn't rush into things or be goaded into hasty actions; they can afford to wait weeks, months, or even years to deal with a threat like the PCs, during which time they'll be making new vampires, enthralling humans, and building up the physical defenses of their lair. The area where a vampire rests should be as secure as a bank vault, and it might have several false crypts to trap and kill those who hunt it. Use GM intrusions in response to PC actions to show that the vampire has already thought through these plans and put countermeasures in place.

Decorate your gaming area with vampire- or gothic-themed items. Load up some atmospheric music (wolves and bats are a plus). Wear pale makeup when you GM, and try some plastic fangs (denture props won't interfere with talking and look much better than the one-piece hinged novelty teeth). Find Halloween recipes for vampire-themed food and drinks and serve them during the game, especially if you can have a scene where the master vampire hosts a meal for the PCs.

Poor Choices, page 94

Vampire Inspiration

Blade *(Marvel comic; 1998 film)*

Buffy the Vampire Slayer *(1997 TV series)*

Dark Shadows *(1966 TV series)*

Daybreakers *(2009 film)*

Dracula *(1897 Bram Stoker novel)*

Nosferatu *(1922 film)*

Salem's Lot *(1975 Stephen King novel)*

Shadow of the Vampire *(2000 film)*

Underworld *(2003 film)*

Let Me In *(2010 film)*/ Let the Right One In *(2008 film)*

30 Days of Night *(2007 film and 2002 comic)*

The Hunger *(1983 film)*

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Something howls in the night, and the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. Your distant ancestors were prey to dangerous beasts, and some primitive part of your brain remembers that. The werewolf is a beast that hunts in city streets or lonely moors, killing anyone it finds, and the next morning you'd walk right past it on the street because it seems to be an ordinary barista, security guard, or student.

Nowadays, the werewolf curse is also a metaphor for contagious diseases, especially sexually transmitted infections like hepatitis and HIV.

The werewolf genre also applies to people who turn into other kinds of dangerous animals (panthers, giant snakes, and so on), whether voluntarily or involuntarily.

WHY ARE THEY SCARY?

In terms of physical threat, a common wolf is an apex predator equipped with sharp teeth, keen senses, and the ability to outrun its prey. According to modern folklore, a four-legged werewolf is even more dangerous. Even in "wolfman" form, a werewolf is larger, smarter, more savage, and more dangerous than a wolf—comparable to a physically fit human with natural weapons, combat training, and overdosing on steroids. Throw in a contagious curse and invulnerability to most weapons and it's clear why the idea of a werewolf loose nearby is terrifying.

Werewolf GM intrusion: *The werewolf ignores or rapidly heals from a wound that isn't caused by silver, taking no damage.*

Once it's suspected or known that the creature responsible for recent attacks is a werewolf, paranoia takes root. People become suspicious of each other, shunning strangers, friends, and family in case one of them is secretly a beast. People hate secrets that put them at risk, and they blame the werewolf for its own curse even if the poor soul is unaware that they're the one afflicted. Some folk turn their fear inward, wondering if they might be the werewolf, and if their presence is a risk to their loved ones. Of course, the real fear is that anyone could be the werewolf, even someone you love, turning into a monster and killing you when you thought you were safe.

Werewolf GM intrusion: *The werewolf's bite is especially savage, feeling very hot or cold and afflicting the target with the werewolf's curse unless they make a Might defense roll.*

HORROR MODULES

- Ghostly Helpers
- Hallucination Reset
- Hysteria
- Instant Panic
- Last Survivor
- Poor Choices
- Secret Twist (you're the werewolf)
- Shock
- Unease

RISKS

Players are usually familiar enough with basic werewolf tropes that they can take precautions to be sure they aren't the werewolf or can't hurt anyone if they are (such as locking themselves in a jail cell). Fortunately, stories conflict enough that the PCs may not be certain how the werewolves in your game work (see the sidebar), so let the players decide what they think is correct, then throw them a curveball with a werewolf that breaks some of their expectations. For example, in the movie *Cat People*, sexual intercourse turns a werepanther into its beast form, killing a person returns them to human form, and the moon has nothing to do with it.

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Making Werewolves Scary in Your Game

A werewolf could be *anyone*, and it's common for a cursed werewolf to be someone innocuous in real life—a quiet college student, a nervous bank teller, or a chatty retiree. Let the players stir themselves into second-guessing everything every NPC says. They can read double meanings into harmless comments, interpret anger or aggression as a threat, and assume that people who have weird dreams or absences are covering for their nocturnal hunting. A werewolf might fabricate or lie about an alibi to protect its identity, then reinforce that alibi with help from an accomplice (or a secret second werewolf). Eventually, the PCs will believe that they can trust only their own senses and everything else is suspect.

There's always the possibility that a PC is a werewolf and unaware of it. You can play up this question by having characters find mysterious minor injuries they don't remember getting (which happens all the time in real life but becomes ominous under these circumstances), get unusual reactions from dogs and other animals, wake up in strange places (which could be from drinking or drug use), or have dreams of violence or being chased.

Remind players how contagious the werewolf curse is by having a survivor (or someone who looks dead but is barely alive) transform into a beast later the same night it was attacked. A murder scene might be so bloody that the PCs don't realize there was a second victim who escaped and will soon begin their own rampage.

Werewolves heal quickly. If its in-combat healing doesn't make it a lasting threat, have a wounded werewolf run away. Whether it returns on its own or the PCs catch up to it, it can be almost completely healed and ready to fight again.

Have the story about a vicious attack reach the news or the tabloids, at which point it becomes a source of panic for NPCs. There will be some kooks who believe it's werewolves (perhaps created by the government to be super-soldiers or mutated accidentally because of chemtrails or fluoridated water), but most sane people will gravitate toward rumors about a pack of wild dogs, gang initiations, a serial killer, or a fast-acting kind of Ebola virus. These sorts of rumors are enough to trigger a panic, and local communities will try to find a scapegoat—probably someone with a different nationality, religion, or ethnicity.

If you give the PCs unsettling dreams, write a different dream note for each player so everybody gets one. That way the players don't automatically know that one of them is getting a werewolf dream.

Werewolf Inspiration

An American Werewolf in London *(1981 film)*

Cat People *(1942 film)*

Dog Soldiers *(2002 film)*

Ginger Snaps *(2000 film)*

The Howling *(1981 film)*

Underworld *(2003 film)*

The Wolf Man *(1941 film)*

Werewolf Questions to Answer

Can a werewolf by killed only by silver, or is that a myth? Or is it that silver inflicts more damage than other materials?

Is a werewolf's human form protected like their beast form? What about wolfsbane?

Can a werewolf change form at will, or does it happen only because of the full moon? Or does something else (like stress) trigger it?

Does a werewolf have an anthropomorphic ("wolfman") form, and does it have claws? Do they look like normal wolves or distorted wolflike monsters? How big is their wolf form?

Does a werewolf have a human mind in its wolf form? Or is it more like a human overcome by rage, or purely the mind of a beast? Does the human remember its time as a wolf? If so, do they know they're a wolf, or do they rationalize those memories as dreams?

Are werewolves contagious? Is the curse transferred by bite, or by any attack? Or is it hereditary?

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Zombies shamble around, their mortal wounds graphically visible, their mindless moans filling the air. Only when they sense the presence of meat—or, in some cases, brains—do they show more vitality, eagerly moving forward with suicidal recklessness.

Zombies are more dangerous when they have a master. This might be a necromancer, a mad scientist directing them with vibrations, or a clever villain who knows how to lure them to exactly the wrong spot.

WHY ARE THEY SCARY?

Culturally and viscerally, we avoid contact with corpses. Whatever caused their death has left its mark, whether that's crushing damage from a car accident, bloody holes from a shooting, or the ravaging effects of a terminal disease. Most people are near a cadaver only as part of a funeral, where the body has been washed, dressed, sanitized, and prettified, so seeing the broken and rotting body of a zombie is disturbing.

Zombie babies, children, and pets are an almost overused trope, but are a precision horror tool if used well.

Zombies used to be *people*. They had friends, family, and neighbors. They wear clothes and wedding rings, and they carry wallets with identification. The fact that they're now things is an affront to the normalcy of life. "They can't be dead, I had lunch with them just yesterday" is even more jarring when the not-person isn't an inert corpse but a walking horror that wants to eat human flesh. Zombies invoke a sense of both pity and fear because humans feel sorry for who they used to be while knowing that if the zombie catches them, they'll become a zombie too.

Zombie GM intrusion: *Part of a zombie's body (such as its jaws or a hand) tears free after its successful attack and automatically inflicts 1 point of damage each round (ignores Armor) until a character uses an action to remove it.*

The slow transformation of a living person into a zombie is part of what makes their attacks so dangerous. A victim can smell the wound becoming infected, watch lines of its sickness spreading along their veins, and feel the chills and fever as the transformation progresses. It's always a question of how long you can hold out, whether you'll have the strength to kill yourself before you turn, and who you'll hurt if you fail—not just fear for yourself, but anxiety about your undead interactions with others.

Zombie GM intrusion: *A zombie arrives that is or resembles someone the PCs know, hindering their actions against it by two steps.*

HORROR MODULES

- Character Posse
- Fragility
- Hysteria
- Instant Panic
- Ironman
- Last Survivor
- Poor Choices
- Secret Twist (you've been bitten)
- Shock
- Unease

RISKS

Zombies are stupid, and unless large numbers of them are in the way, it's easy for the players to get bored with routine means of eliminating them (such as ranged shots, luring single members away from a pack to quickly tag-team them, and so on). Because zombies are mostly uniform in terms of their abilities, you have to create interesting environments for zombie encounters. Instead of a pack of zombies walking through a forest or along a road, have the PCs get ambushed in a clothing store surrounded by mannequins.

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Have a fight on a decaying roof where people can fall through the floor, in a lake or river where movement is hindered, or in a theater or mall where zombies on the upper floor can fall onto the PCs. If the characters find hints that someone is controlling the zombies, the players will second-guess everything and not take a "normal" encounter with zombies for granted.

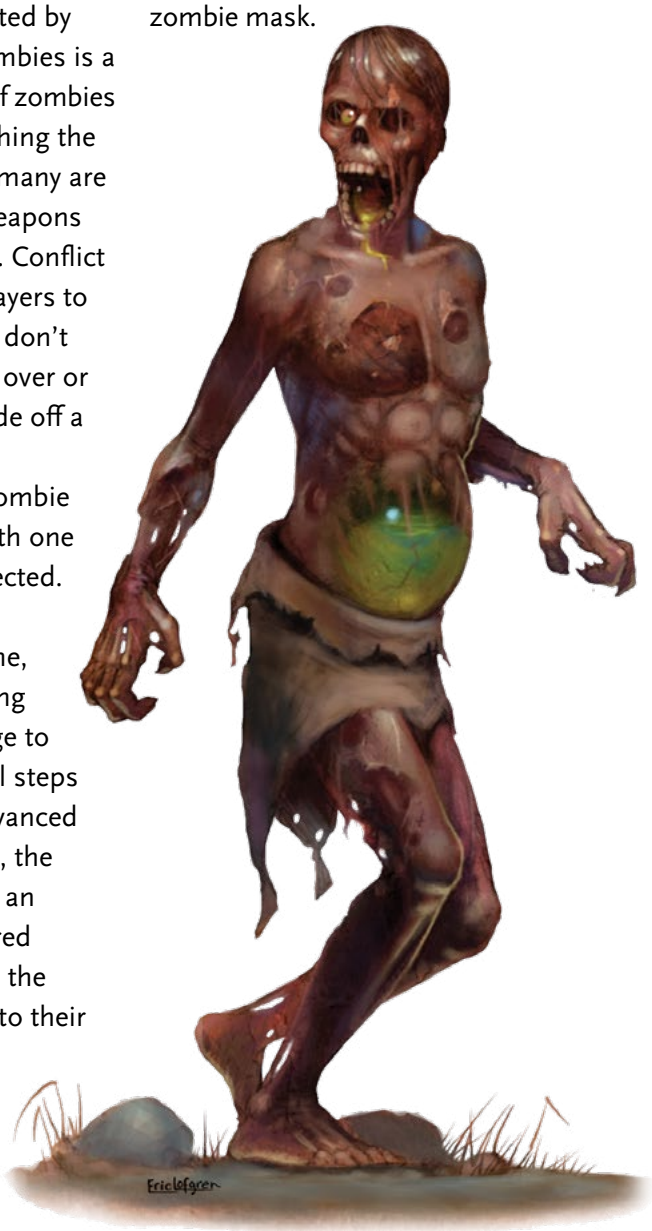
Making Zombies Scary in Your Game

One zombie isn't a threat unless facing a solo PC who is distracted by something else. A group of zombies is a reasonable challenge. A *horde* of zombies is terrifying because it's something the PCs can't directly defeat (how many are in a horde depends on what weapons the PCs have at their disposal). Conflict with a horde also forces the players to think of creative solutions that don't involve combat, such as going over or under them or leading the horde off a cliff or into a river.

An interesting option for a zombie game is to start the session with one or more characters already infected. This adds the pressure of an uncertain time limit to the game, with the potential for debilitating effects (perhaps simple damage to character Pools, or perhaps full steps on the damage track for an advanced case). Instead of basic survival, the group might be trying to reach an extraction point, a place rumored to have a cure, or a spot where the doomed PCs can say goodbye to their loved ones.

If any characters get killed and turn into zombies, in a reverse of the Ghostly Helpers horror module, allow them to use their subtle cyphers to interfere with the living PCs' attempts to escape. To keep it fair and represent that the zombies are mindless, have the zombies pool their cyphers and randomly draw which one to use in a situation.

Have simple makeup handy that can make someone look sick or like a zombie. If a PC gets bitten, have their player step out and add some quick makeup to show that they're getting sick. If they succumb to the infection, upgrade their makeup to something fully zombified or have them put on a zombie mask.



Zombie GM intrusion: *A zombie suddenly reacts more quickly than expected, easing its attacks and movement actions for the next few rounds.*

Zombie GM intrusion: *A zombie bursts open or vomits its liquefied rotting contents on a character, infecting them with disease if they fail a Might defense roll and hindering all their actions for the next several rounds.*

Damage Track, page 218

Ghostly Helpers, page 87

Zombie Inspiration

28 Days Later *(2002 film)*

"Herbert West—Reanimator" (1922 Lovecraft short story; 1985 film Re-Animator*)*

Night of the Living Dead *(1968 film)*

Resident Evil *(1996 videogame; film franchise)*

Shaun of the Dead *(2004 film)*

The Walking Dead *(2003 comic; 2010 TV series)*

Zombieland *(2009 film)*

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This chapter is intended for GMs, but gameplay may go more smoothly if players understand how these game mechanics work.

This chapter describes many different optional rules (called "horror modules") for making horror games more exciting or suspenseful. Horror modules are tweaks the GM applies to the rules to make a horror scenario even more scary or to represent how an event usually happens in a horror genre. Examples of this include giving the group a larger cast of characters so some of them can get killed off, restricting the healing options available to the PCs so they're more vulnerable, or playing up how often people draw attention to themselves by screaming when there are monsters in the area.

Memorable Horror Moment: *The scene in* The Fly *when Ronnie hits Brundlefly in the face and its humanlike facade begins to break apart.*

Some modules are meant for the GM's eyes only—things that happen behind the scenes or that are secrets the PCs might find out over the course of the game. For example, in a game where an angry ghost is linked to an old ring, the players don't need to know beforehand that the GM is using the Bad Penny module and the ring will keep showing up if they try to get rid of it (knowing that also spoils the secret that the ring is the root of the problem). The players also don't need to know if the GM is using Instant Panic, as that spoils the fact that the PCs will see something supernatural during the game.

If a module changes the options that players or PCs have, the GM should tell the players about it when the game begins. For example, if the GM is using the Character Posse module, the players should know about it at the start of the game so they can become familiar with all their characters instead of having to pause when they switch scenes and spend several minutes reviewing a second set of characters. Likewise, players should know if their healing options are affected by the Ironman module, or if they have additional recovery roll options from the Hysteria module.

This chapter also suggests various modules that are appropriate for different horror genres. The GM should feel free to use some, all, or none of those modules when running a game of that type, or introduce other modules to provide a unique twist to the game.

BAD PENNY

An unwanted or dangerous object (such as a cursed artifact) keeps turning up, no matter how many times the PCs try to discard or destroy it. In many cases, there might be only one way to rid themselves of the item (such as dousing it with holy water or burying it in a graveyard) or only one way to destroy it (such as burning it in a church or stabbing it with a magical dagger). The item might slowly repair itself—and depending on the item, it might be more frightening if it shows up fully intact or still bearing damage from how the PCs tried to destroy it.

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General Horror GM Intrusions

The following GM intrusions work for most horror genres.

- Something foils a character's attempt to escape: a getaway car won't start, they drop the keys that unlock the exit door or lock up the villain, or the shotgun they're using to clear a path jams or runs out of shells.
- The antagonist enters a secure or sealed room by an unexpected method: crashing through a door or wall, crawling out of a ventilation shaft, jumping out of a trap door, manifesting electronically through a Wi-Fi signal, or teleporting.
- A mysterious noise nearby amplifies the tension, and when investigated reveals itself to be . . . a cat, either perfectly calm or hissing and leaping. This often allows for a momentary de-escalation followed by a real scare, such as the antagonist reaching out of the darkness to grab a character.
- A dramatic and/or ridiculous amount of blood and gore from something that just got killed splashes on a character, blinding them until they take an action to wipe their eyes clean.

This reappearance usually isn't because the item is literally walking to wherever the PCs are (although if the item is something like a cursed doll, that might make it more frightening). In most cases, it just happens to be where the PCs went, found in an unobtrusive place like the back of a closet, under a car seat, or in the bottom of someone's luggage. If the item is intelligent (or controlled by a hostile intelligence), it might use NPCs to bring it back to the PCs, and might sacrifice those NPCs in dramatic and gory ways to make sure it ends up back in the hands of the PCs. For example, if the PCs abandon a haunted ring, on the next day when they're waiting for a train they recognize a man they saw earlier just as he gets hit by an oncoming train, and his severed hand—wearing the ring—lands at their feet. Even if the PCs go to a remote area with no people, one of them might suddenly vomit up their lunch—and the haunted ring.

Memorable Horror Moment: *The first time we see the werewolf's painful transformation in* An American Werewolf in London.

Character Posse

Every player is given at least two characters to run, each with about the same amount of background and abilities so they're all suitable as main characters. A player usually runs only one of these PCs at a time. As the action in the story changes locations, the GM can have one or more players switch their active PC and interact with

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the other active PCs and the story in a different way. This keeps the players from knowing which characters are supposed to have the important roles in the story, allows for some of the PCs to split off for a while without the rest of the group having to wait, and gives every player a backup character to play if their active PC dies.

Example: Bruce, Monte, and Shanna are playing a horror scenario where a masked killer is attacking a campground. Bruce is playing athletic teen Blair, Monte is playing camp counselor teen Max, and Shanna is playing bookish teen Sandy. When Sandy calls the sheriff to report an emergency, the GM can cut to the sheriff's office where Sheriff Garcia (played by Shanna), Deputy Ramirez (played by Bruce), and Old Man Cratchit (played by Monte) can discuss the "prank" phone call from the campground. If any of the teens are killed or wander off (maybe due to a GM intrusion), one or more of the adults can show up at the campground—perhaps to provide reinforcements, or just in time to take a hit meant for a different PC.

Memorable Horror Moment: *The scene in* The Others *when the little girl turns and her face is that of a blind old woman.*

Character Posse works best when the characters are very simple and don't have many abilities that require a lot of knowledge and description. That way the player can focus on the personality of the PC and not have to keep remembering a stack of complicated abilities. In a non-fantastic modern setting, that often means characters who have a lot of skills and automatic or simple bonuses (like Combat Prowess and Fleet of Foot) but one or zero abilities that have durations or require special actions (like Anecdote and Muscles of Iron).

Combat Prowess, page 120

Fleet of Foot, page 141

Anecdote, page 109

Muscles of Iron, page 165

Dead All Along

A handful of people are forced to stick together under unusual circumstances—they're survivors of a shipwreck, quarantined to avoid an outbreak of a deadly disease, waiting for a riot to leave their neighborhood, or locked away from an approaching zombie horde. They hear strange noises, glimpse shadowy figures, and find that things move about or disappear when nobody is looking. The PCs begin to suspect they're being haunted by ghosts or observed by mysterious aliens; one or more of them disappear or are found dead. Eventually the PCs realize that they are ghosts of people who haven't come to terms with their own deaths, and the weird experiences are their limited interactions with the real world and the living people trying to bury their bodies or put their souls at peace.

In these stories, the emotional journey of the ghosts is about understanding their situation and coming to terms with their deaths. In normal play, GM intrusions are complications that the characters have to deal with, but to represent the secret and inverted expectation of this module, GM intrusions are used to *simplify* what the characters experience, but with a spooky twist.

Example: A ghost PC is struggling to open a door, not realizing that the problem they're having is because it's difficult for ghosts to move corporeal objects. The GM offers the PC 2 XP and says "You feel the doorknob turn in your hand and the door starts to swing open, but . . ." If the PC accepts the intrusion, the GM finishes with "you feel a brief cold sensation and hear a faint voice ask 'Is anyone there?'" The PC might

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think the voice is that of a ghost, but the GM knows that a living person heard the rattle, opened the door to see what was causing the noise, and asked a question to the empty air.

Example: The dead PCs have decided to go through several areas looking for the source of what is "haunting" them. The GM uses a group intrusion to have them followed by muttering voices (living people talking), lights being switched on and off (by living people), a shout (someone frightened by the action of a ghost character), and a weird smell (burned sage to cleanse the area of negative spirits). The GM may have the PCs "jump" from room to room, not mentioning the transitions between them, to provide a subtle clue that they're not really walking from one area to another (and might actually be passing through walls and floors instead of using doors and stairs).

When a PC has acquired 3 XP this way, the GM can send the player a secret message (perhaps with a text or a Special Card) revealing the truth of their situation; soon their character will cross over and disappear, perhaps by wandering off alone or vanishing when nobody is looking at them.

This module works much like a psychological horror setup or a traditional ghost haunting. The PCs are unreliable narrators and some of what they experience isn't real, but the players naturally assumed that their characters were alive.

This module is interesting to combine with the Character Posse module. There could be a group of (dead) PCs who want to be rescued, and a group of (living) PCs trying to rescue them, but communication channels are erratic (perhaps explained as a damaged phone, poor reception, or weird weather). The dead PCs get intrusion XP when they accept simplifying intrusions, the living ones get intrusion XP when they accept complicating intrusions, and none of the PCs or players know that some of the characters are dead until the end of the session, when the living PCs find the bodies of the dead ones.

FRAGILITY

Whenever a character selects the Increasing Capabilities option for advancement or gains an ability that permanently increases their Pools, they can add a maximum of 1 point to their Might Pool and 1 point to their Speed Pool; other points left over (if any) must go to their Intellect Pool, even if that's not normally an option for the ability. This does not apply to the extra points the player can divide among their Pools at character creation. This creates a more "realistic" game scenario where the PCs are more like normal people who don't get much more powerful physically over the course of a campaign, but still can learn new skills, advance their minds, and so on.

This module does not affect abilities like Enlarge (which *temporarily* adds 4 points to your Might Pool), but it does affect abilities like Enhanced Might, Enhanced Speed, and Lead From the Front (which permanently increase one or more Pools).

GHOSTLY HELPERS

In a horror story, it's common for major characters to be killed or incapacitated, but in a horror RPG, that means the player of a dead character doesn't

Increasing Capabilities, page 17

When a PC crosses over and disappears, that player can still participate in the game by using the Ghostly Helpers module.

Special Cards, page 221

Examples of a more realistic scenario are a horror noir campaign or 1920s-era investigators encountering Lovecraftian entities. Many foci, such as Grows to Towering Heights, would be inappropriate for these settings.

Grows to Towering Heights, page 69

Enlarge, page 135

Enhanced Might, page 135

Enhanced Speed, page 135

Lead From the Front, page 157

Character Posse, page 85

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Subtle Cyphers, page 378

Help from a dead character doesn't have to be from a ghost. Depending on the genre, it might be the influence of a guilty artificial intelligence, a sentient weapon with a grudge, a cultist with conflicting loyalties, and so on.

have much to do. The Ghostly Helpers module gives players whose characters are out of the game two ways to have an active role in the scenario.

First, the dead character is still able to spend their XP to give a living character a reroll. To facilitate this, the GM should allow players to award the second 1 XP from a GM intrusion to a dead character (although this would come up only if there is one character left alive and the second XP would be wasted) and give dead characters 1 XP whenever there is a group intrusion.

Second, the dead character is able to use their subtle cyphers to help a living character. Depending on the cypher, this might be a direct benefit to the PC (like easing a roll) or interfering with an NPC (like making an opponent drop their weapon). When the GM gives out more subtle cyphers, any excess ones (beyond the cypher limit of living PCs) should go to the dead characters, up to the cypher limits of the dead characters (any extra cyphers beyond that are lost).

The player of a dead character always gets to decide when to help and which PC to affect with their help—they're not merely extensions of the living PCs. Whether this help is just fate or coincidence working on behalf of the PC, or if it literally is the lingering ghost of a dead character trying to save a living person, depends on the scenario and the GM.

HALLUCINATION RESET

In some horror genres, it's unclear if the character is truly experiencing what's happening in the story, or if they're hallucinating or dreaming it. In some cases, their fear response to the real events happening around them prompts their conscious or subconscious imagination to create an unreal scenario that's even more terrifying, only to have them snap out of it and find themselves in a prior (but perhaps still very dangerous) situation. This sort of hallucination allows the story to go completely off the rails and then suddenly return to normal.

If the GM plans to have a hallucination reset, they should keep track of damage taken, equipment used, and XP spent for each character (if using cypher and XP cards, there should

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be a separate space for each character's used cards). When the hallucination ends, stop the action, explain that the PCs find themselves at an earlier point in the story (or wake up after some time has passed if it's a dream), and restore their Pools, equipment, and XP to their previous state. If the GM doesn't know exactly how much each character's Pool changed, allow each PC to make a free recovery roll to compensate for it.

If the GM needs to use a hallucination reset to recover from a disastrous outcome, they should try to reset the PCs as close as possible to their previous state, relying on the players' recollection of which cyphers and XP belonged to each character. As it's unlikely that they kept track of how many Pool points they spent in the now-false encounters, the GM can allow each of them a free recovery roll to make up for it.

Used carefully, a hallucination reset leaves the characters wondering what is real, and it can be a tool for the GM to rewind an encounter that goes out of control or accidentally kills a character because of poor rolls. Used too much, it risks causing the players to lose interest in the game because the frequent resets undermine their emotional connections to their characters and negate any progress in the story.

Note that a deliberate and planned reset can deliberately do strange things with the story because it's completely in the characters' heads. A horror game about werewolves might have a dream or hallucination about fascist soldiers attacking the PCs with flamethrowers. One about aliens might show the antagonists turning into sexy vampires. A haunted house might convince the PCs that they're tearing off their own faces. A hallucination might even include elements of something that will happen in the future, so when the actual event occurs (perhaps in a later session) the players won't know if they should act on their "future memories" of these events or ignore them as falsehoods.

Examples of good hallucination resets in horror films are Ripley's chestburster scene in Aliens, *the dream sequences in* An American Werewolf in London, *the end of* Jacob's Ladder, *and multiple events in* A Nightmare on Elm Street.

Horror Mode

Horror Mode is an optional rule discussed in the *Cypher System Rulebook*. When using this rule, the GM can escalate the tension by increasing the range of numbers that trigger a GM intrusion: first on a roll of 1 or 2 instead of 1, then a roll of 1 to 3, then a roll of 1 to 4, and so on. The Escalation Rate table below shows what causes the intrusion range to increase.

Optional Rule: Horror Mode, page 283

Horror Mode is unique among the horror modules in that the default assumption is that the GM is using it for *every* horror game, at least some of the time. Using Horror Mode makes the players aware of the risks they take every time they make a roll. They won't take easy tasks for granted, and they might apply Effort to turn an easy task into a routine task so they don't have to roll at all and risk an intrusion. This ends up depleting their Pools faster, which makes them feel more vulnerable.

Using a hallucination reset to recover from disaster is thematically similar to a time loop, which horror films such as Resolution *(2012) and* Triangle *(2009) use to create interesting stories.*

Escalation Rate

Activity	Intrusion Range Increases by 1
Exploring a large area	Every time a new intrusion is indicated by a die roll
Exploring	Every ten minutes or every time a new intrusion is indicated by a die roll
Combat	Each round

Memorable Horror Moment: *The scene in* Aliens *when Jonesy the cat hisses at Ripley in the medical lab.*

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HYSTERIA

Screaming is a natural reaction when you're frightened, but it's also likely to draw the attention of whatever is frightening you. The Hysteria horror module encourages characters to give in to the natural instinct to scream, but introduces dangerous consequences for doing so.

At any time, as an action, a PC can use a free one-action recovery roll (which doesn't use up the one-action recovery roll that all characters get), but doing so means they also spend that action loudly screaming. Because of this noise, the GM can make a free intrusion and doesn't have to award XP for it.

GM Intrusion, page 408

A PC's ten-minute recovery roll takes only one minute, but the PC has to scream and have an emotional meltdown for the entire time. As with the previous option, this allows the GM to make a free intrusion (after the recovery period) and they don't have to award XP for it. The PC still has the option of resting normally for ten minutes to use the ten-minute recovery roll (without screaming, and without the free intrusion).

In most situations that use Hysteria, the free intrusions involve drawing the attention of something that wants to harm the PCs or the sudden appearance of something dangerous.

INSTANT PANIC

Most people in real life aren't prepared for the existence of aliens, monsters, or killer robots, and seeing something that shatters their worldview is frightening and traumatic. The first time a character sees a creature (or anything else suitably horrifying) they thought wasn't possible or only existed in books and movies, they must make an Intellect defense roll against the creature's level. If they fail, for one round either they're paralyzed with fear or they run in the opposite direction.

Repeat appearances by the creature (or other creatures like it) that they've seen before usually don't trigger this reaction a second time, but encountering a large number of those creatures or seeing them do something unusual might trigger it. For example, seeing a ghoul crawl out of a storm drain might trigger panic; seeing another ghoul (or the same one again) won't trigger it again, but seeing a large pack of ghouls approaching, or seeing one ghoul *eating a dead person* could trigger another panic reaction. Even if a character has gotten over their initial panic, the GM can prompt it again as an intrusion if the circumstances warrant it.

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Ironman

There are no cyphers (subtle or manifest) or artifacts that heal, and all other healing effects (such as recovery rolls and Healing Touch) restore only the minimum amount possible. For example, a tier 2 character using a recovery roll would get only 3 points (as if they rolled a 1 on a d6, plus 2 for their tier) to add to their Pools. This results in a gritty, dire scenario where the only way PCs can restore their Pools is with recovery rolls and character abilities that heal.

Cypher System characters are tough and resilient, even at tier 1, but Ironman brings them down to a more realistic power level. Ironman is more punitive for characters whose abilities cost Pool points and less of a challenge for characters whose abilities don't cost anything (such as Physical Skills). For a slightly less challenging option, allow the use of healing cyphers and artifacts, but limit them to the minimum amount.

Last Survivor

Sometimes the antagonist kills off all the protagonists one by one, leaving only one survivor to challenge them. In the journey toward that point, it's not clear who the last survivor will be, and sometimes a potential last survivor is eliminated unexpectedly or sacrifices themselves so that another person may live. The Last Survivor horror module is a way for PCs to temporarily thwart fate, but it inevitably feeds toward the last surviving character having extra advantages when dealing with the murderous antagonist.

When using this module, the GM places a token on the game table that represents the last survivor, and puts a piece of paper (or an XP card) underneath the token that represents 1 XP. Whenever there is a GM intrusion, instead of giving 2 XP to a player and letting that player award 1 XP to another player, the GM gives 1 XP to the chosen player, and the other 1 XP is added to the last survivor token. Whenever there is a group intrusion, 1 XP is added to the last survivor token (as if the last survivor were a separate PC).

At any time, a player can decide that their PC becomes the last survivor by picking up the token and its XP.

Healing Touch, page 149

Group intrusion, page 410

Physical Skills, page 170

One of the Special Cards is called Last Survivor. Special Cards, page 221.

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However, those XP belong to the *role* of the last survivor and always remain separate from individual character XP. While a PC is the last survivor, they gain the following benefits and restrictions:

- All rolls to save them from being killed are eased by two steps.
- The last survivor XP can be spent only by the last survivor, and only on the last survivor's rolls, never on any other players' rolls. (The PC can still spend their personal XP normally, including on other players' rolls.)
- At any time, whoever has the token can pass the role of last survivor to another player. The receiving player gets all the XP associated with the last survivor (if there are none, the GM immediately gives 1 XP to the token).
- Once a player has given up the role of last survivor, they can never again be the last survivor.
- If the last survivor role has no XP left to spend, and there are no other players to pass the token to (because everyone else has already been the last survivor), the last survivor can pass the token to the GM in exchange for their character getting 1 XP. Once this happens, the last survivor token is removed from the game.

The GM determines if a roll gets the last survivor bonus. It's also okay for the GM to turn a failed, deadly roll into a successful one by retroactively applying the last survivor bonus.

Optional Rule: Madness, page 284

Optional Rule: Shock, page 282

Mad, page 51

Example: Bear, Charles, and Tammie are playing a horror scenario and the GM is using the Last Survivor module. Tammie's character is about to die from a demon attacking her, so she picks up the last survivor token and its 1 XP; being the last survivor immediately eases her Speed defense roll against the demon's attack by two steps. Later, there is a GM intrusion on Charles's character, and the second XP automatically goes to the last survivor (a role still held by Tammie). In a dangerous battle with the demon, Tammie ends up spending the last survivor's 2 XP to save herself.

Then the demon turns on Bear, so to help him Tammie passes the last survivor token to Bear. Because the last survivor role didn't have any XP left, the GM immediately awards 1 XP to the token, which Bear decides not to spend yet. Later, Bear passes the last survivor role to Charles, who spends the token's 1 XP to reroll a failed Intellect defense roll against the demon's attempt to possess him. In the final battle, the demon attacks Charles again, and he rolls poorly to defend against this attack, so he passes the last survivor token to the GM in exchange for 1 XP for his character, which permanently removes the token from the game.

MADNESS

Madness is an optional rule discussed in the *Cypher System Rulebook*. When using this rule, if Intellect damage from fear or shock reduces a PC's Intellect Pool to 0, they regain points in the Pool, but their maximum Intellect Pool is reduced by 1. If their Intellect Pool is ever reduced to 0 again, they go insane and replace their current descriptor with the Mad descriptor.

PERILOUS VENTURE

Sometimes the PCs need to perform a ritual or other complex action that takes several rounds or minutes, and if they make mistakes along the way it's a setback instead of an outright failure. For example, they might need to read a banishing spell out of an old book, mix and heat the chemicals for a zombie

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cure, or draw a magic circle around a building to contain hostile ghosts. Rather than having their success or failure come down to one roll, the GM can build tension by requiring the players to make multiple rolls called subtasks. The subtasks start at difficulty 1, and the difficulty increases each time until the players make a final roll at the highest difficulty (equal to the overall level of the challenge, such as the demon they want to banish, the original zombie virus, or the most powerful ghost attempting to leave the house).

Generally, these subtasks occur at equally divided intervals over the course of the full time required to complete the ritual. If at any point the PC fails a subtask, the ritual isn't ruined, but it costs time—a failure means the time spent on that subtask was wasted, but the character can spend that much time again and try to succeed at that same subtask.

Skills, assets, and other special abilities can ease subtasks just like they do with any other task (which might make some of the subtasks routine and not require a roll at all). Characters may apply Effort to each subtask. Of course, applying Effort is something characters do in the moment, not over long periods of time, so it's generally impossible to apply sustained Effort on a task or subtask that takes longer than a day.

Example: The PCs are dealing with a house haunted by level 6 ghosts that come out at midnight to kill people. They've learned from an old warlock that carefully drawing a circle around the house with a mix of white salt and black ash will prevent the ghosts from crossing in or out, giving the PCs more time to figure out a way to put the ghosts to rest. It will take an hour to draw the circle, and since they're dealing with level 6 ghosts (which means six subtasks), each subtask will take ten minutes (60 minutes divided by 6). The first subtask's difficulty is 1, the second's is 2, and so on, up to the sixth subtask at difficulty 6. If the PCs fail at a subtask, they've wasted ten minutes of time and have to try that subtask again if they want to continue. Once they succeed on the last subtask roll (difficulty 6), the circle is finished and the ghosts are hedged in.

Routine tasks, page 8

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The GM should decide if a given ritual is something that other PCs can help with. Even if it initially seems like a solo venture (like reading a spell from a book), it might benefit from assistants who repeat a chant, burn candles, perform arcane gestures, or just hold the acting character upright as the ritual drains their strength. In general, giving multiple PCs something to do is better than having everyone wait on the sidelines while one character holds the spotlight.

Memorable Horror Moment: *The scene in* The Blair Witch Project *when they find all of the child handprints.*

To make the situation more interesting, the GM can introduce a time challenge, like requiring the PCs to finish by a specific time (perhaps a midnight deadline for containing the ghosts in the house, or banishing a demon that's inflicting damage to an NPC every round it possesses them). This puts pressure on the PCs to complete the process as soon as possible.

The GM can also add side effects for failed rolls or as intrusions. For example, a weak spot in the salt line might allow one powerful ghost to break free, an error in the banishing spell might painfully enrage the demon and hinder the next subtask, electrical or magical energy might lash out and harm a nearby character, and so on. The ritual might use up quantities of a limited resource, such as holy water, silver powder, or rare herbs; if the PCs have only enough materials to complete the ritual (perhaps with a little extra in case they make one mistake), that forces them to use Effort, XP, and other tricks to make sure they don't fail too often and run out.

Finally, some rituals might require the PCs to spend points from their Pools on each subtask, with Might representing blood or vitality, Speed representing energy, and Intellect representing will or sanity. Other physical or mental tolls could also require points from Pools. Multiple PCs involved in the ritual could collectively contribute to this cost.

POOR CHOICES

Sometimes people in horror do dumb things. They wander off alone to investigate a weird noise. They abandon their friends and try to escape in a rusty old car. They have sex in a spooky barn. These things usually put them in danger and sometimes get them gruesomely killed. Using the Poor Choices module means the GM can use intrusions to make the characters do things that the audience of a horror movie would think are stupid.

These intrusions work like the normal kind (the GM awards 2 XP, and the player gives one of them to another player). However, while normal intrusions are subtle changes that influence the situation, using Poor Choices lets the GM abandon that restraint and dictate a specific overt character action, even if it's something that the player wouldn't normally choose.

These intrusions can be risky, but they shouldn't be obviously self-destructive or harmful. For example, the GM shouldn't use an intrusion to make a PC drink something that they know is poisonous, jump out of an airplane without a parachute, punch a police officer, or stare directly at an eclipse. The idea is to put the character in a complicated situation more forcefully than the player might choose, but not set up the character for failure. The players know they're in a horror

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scenario, but their characters don't, and this helps prevent the players from using metagame knowledge to keep the PCs out of trouble. Another way to look at it is the characters should act as if they live in a world where horror movies don't exist, so they don't know not to do these things.

As with any GM intrusion, the player can choose to spend 1 XP to refuse a Poor Choices intrusion, but they should consider accepting the intrusion for the sake of the story, and because they'll need the XP later.

For examples of Poor Choices intrusions, see the box on page 96.

POSSESSION

Some demons have the ability to possess a living creature, taking over a character's body as if it were the demon's own. The demon must touch the character to attempt possession (even if the demon's touch normally inflicts damage, the possession attempt doesn't inflict damage). The character must make an Intellect defense roll or become possessed, whereupon the demon's immaterial form disappears into the character.

The first round in which a character is possessed, they can act normally. In the second and all subsequent rounds, the possessing demon can try to control the actions of the host, but the character can attempt an Intellect defense roll to resist each suggested action. Successful resistance means that the character does nothing for one round. When the demon isn't trying to control its host, the character can act as they choose. A possessing demon's actions are limited to controlling its host and leaving the host (the demon can't use its own abilities while in someone else's body).

Memorable Horror Moment: *The scene in* It *when Pennywise appears to Georgie in the storm drain.*

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POOR CHOICES INTRUSIONS

The following are examples of GM intrusions to use with the Poor Choices module.

- A character investigates a strange noise on their own. ("It'll be fine!")
- Two or more characters sneak off to have sex.
- A character leaves behind an important piece of equipment, such as a weapon, phone, car keys, or their outer layer of clothes. (The GM can use this intrusion after the fact when a player tries to use a specific item.)
- A character gets drunk or high.
- A character falls asleep.
- A character slips away to urinate out in the woods or a nearby scary building.
- A character doesn't care that nearby animals are acting strange (especially if they're guard dogs).
- A character doesn't shoot a dead monster in the head. ("We need to save ammo.")
- A character runs away into the dark or away from a place that would be a better, safer direction to run.
- A character reads aloud words from the weird old book they found, or they play an old recording of someone else reading the book aloud.
- In a multistory building, a character runs upstairs or down into a basement (where they could get cornered) instead of outside where they could escape in any direction.
- A character chooses a dumb or obvious hiding place, such as a closet or under a bed.
- A character tries to escape by squeezing through a space that no human could reasonably get through quickly, such as a doggie door or a tiny window in a garage door.
- A character hides the fact that they've been bitten by a zombie, have a weird rash like the one they saw on the walls of the alien spaceship, or have been hearing a spooky voice telling them to kill their friends. ("I'll be okay.")
- A character runs straight down the road to get away from a pursuing vehicle (instead of onto the sidewalk, behind a big tree, or around a tight corner).
- A prone or supine character crawls away from approaching danger instead of getting up and running.
- A character doesn't call the local authorities for help when they hear something dangerous.
- A character ignores or rationalizes a weird noise.
- A character jumps into the water—a lake, swimming pool, sacred fountain, and so on.
- A character goes into the cave, mine shaft, or creepy house. ("I'm just going to look around for a second.")
- A character insists on staying behind while everyone else goes on ahead. ("Someone should be here when the sheriff shows up!")
- A character doesn't check the back seat of a car before getting in and starting it.
- A character ignores an obvious creepy clue that there's something wrong in the house, like a bloody axe, a room full of taxidermy animal heads, or newspaper clippings about recent murders.
- While being pursued, a character calls for help or otherwise attracts attention (like banging on store windows at midnight).
- A character tries to pet an unknown lifeform.
- A character tries to make peaceful contact with an obviously hostile entity. ("It's as frightened of us as we are of it!")
- A character unlocks a door or disables a security system to let a scared stranger into a safe area.
- A character doesn't bother to turn on the lights.
- A character uses an action taunting their foe.
- A character follows a trail of blood.
- A character ignores good advice from a helpful and knowledgeable NPC. ("That old lady was a superstitious kook.")
- A character uses a firearm as a loud, ineffective solution for a simple problem (like shooting a padlock).
- A character picks up a shady or outright scary-looking hitchhiker.
- A character scares another character (perhaps by grabbing their shoulder unexpectedly and shouting) as a joke.
- A character momentarily forgets how to do a simple action, like open or close a door.
- A character forgets to put their phone on silent mode.
- A character imitates or makes fun of a creepy doll or statue.
- A character tries to help a child who has no reason for being there.

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While it possesses another creature, the demon is immune to most attacks (though not so the host; killing the host will eject the demon).

A possessed character is allowed an Intellect defense roll once per day to try to eject the demon. The roll is hindered by one additional step each day of possession after the first seven days. An ejected, cast-out, or exorcised demon is powerless for one or more days. One way to exorcise a demon is to command it out in the name of an entity that has power over the demon. This can be attempted once per day and grants the possessed character an additional Intellect defense roll to eject the demon.

Other kinds of creatures (ghosts, beings of pure mental energy, and so on) may have the ability to possess characters in the same way that demons do.

SECRET TWIST

It's common when tensions are high and lives are on the line that humans get paranoid and start to turn on each other, interpreting stressed behavior as suspicious and seeing enemies in the eyes of strangers. This is compounded when there is an active threat that can disguise itself as human (like an alien or demon) or take off a mask and pretend to be a fellow prisoner or victim (like a chainsaw killer), only to reveal themselves when the perfect opportunity comes along. These secret twists are the source of many jump scares and unexpected betrayals that create chaos and paranoia.

To use a secret twist, the GM first needs to decide three things:

- The secrets they want the PCs to keep from each other. Examples might be "Your character is actually the shapechanging alien that is hunting everyone on the spaceship," "The chainsaw killer is the identical twin of your character," or "Another PC ruined your life but they don't realize who you are."
- The best time to reveal the secret to the player involved. This might be something the player learns before the game starts or a revelation during the game. If there are multiple secrets, the players might learn them at different times. For example, the PC whose life was ruined by another character might know this at the start of the game, but another PC might not know they had an identical twin (perhaps they were separated at birth).
- The best time to reveal the secret to the other characters. The GM might choose to push it out into the open (perhaps with a GM intrusion) or let the player decide when to reveal it. For example, the GM decides that walking into a dark room with a black light is how all the human PCs realize that one character is really a shapeshifting alien with UV-fluorescing skin, but the GM allows the PC whose family fortune was stolen by another character to bring that up on their own (perhaps when they're alone with the thief).

If revealing the secret to the players is supposed to happen during the game, it would be suspicious if only one player was pulled aside for a conversation about it—the other players would know something unusual was going on. Instead, the GM can call a quick break in the game and send that player a text. Even better, the GM could send *every*

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player a secret text so that nobody is singled out by having to read a text. Alternatively, the GM can give a physical note to every player (perhaps using the secret twist Special Cards); some of these notes might be secrets and some innocuous, but the fact that everyone gets a note disguises who might be getting a secret twist. By making sure that each note has some kind of value (such as by letting a player trade it in later for an asset or a subtle cypher), players who don't receive a special secret still spend a reasonable amount of time reading the note and keeping it safe.

The Special Cards include premade and fill-in-the-blank secret twist cards. *Special Cards, page 221.*

If the players are especially skilled at roleplaying, there may be opportunities for multiple secret twists, especially those that change a character's identity. For example, in a scenario where there are duplicates of the PCs walking around in their city (evil twins, clones, aliens, or the like), the identity of individual characters might switch from the originals to duplicates and back again several times during the game.

Multiple shifts of identity are probably easier for the GM and players to handle if they take place over several game sessions and each session starts with players knowing exactly who they're playing. It also helps if the players take separate notes about what the original and the duplicate know.

SHOCK

Optional Rule: Shock, page 282

Shock is an optional rule discussed in the *Cypher System Rulebook*. When using this rule, seeing something terrifying means a PC must make an Intellect defense roll. The difficulty is based on the level of the scary thing, or the GM can simply choose the level (see the Shock Levels table). Failure on the defense roll means either the character takes Intellect damage or the player temporarily loses control of the character (the GM decides if they scream, freeze, run, or take some other appropriate action, perhaps with input from the player).

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SHOCK LEVELS

Event	Level
Something unexpected darts or jumps out	1
Something suddenly moves just out of the corner of the eye	2
A sudden loud noise (like a scream)	2
Unexpectedly seeing a corpse	2
Watching someone die	3
Seeing something impossible (like an inanimate object sliding across the floor)	4
Watching a friend die	5
Seeing a monstrous creature	Creature level
Witnessing something supernatural (like a spell)	5
Seeing something mind-bending (like an impossible, multidimensional demigod coalescing out of thin air)	8

UNEASE

Horror isn't always overt monstrosities trying to tear your limbs off or drag your soul into Hell. Sometimes it's something slightly off-putting, a stretching of the norm, an itching behind your eyes, or a sinking feeling in your stomach. You can feel that something is wrong, but you don't know exactly what, and you're not sure what to do about it. Your body isn't sure if it should jump into fight or flight, so you're anticipating a spike of adrenaline and it's very distracting.

With the Unease horror module, whenever a character is in the presence of something disturbing that risks breaking their worldview, all their actions are hindered. Normally this happens whenever the triggering situation is within a short distance of the character, but the range might vary depending on what the PC sees and the nature of the disturbance. For example, a demon the size of a house might cause unease whenever it's within very long range, but a city-sized alien starship hovering in the sky might affect people whenever they can see it even though it's a thousand miles away.

If the GM plans to have an ongoing Unease effect throughout an entire game session (like an alien death fleet), they should consider using physical reminders in the game area so players don't forget its effects. Over time, the GM might allow characters to become used to these worrying sights, perhaps due to exposure or maybe by purchasing the familiarity as a medium-term benefit.

Some creatures in the Cypher System already have the ability to make others uncomfortable just by being in the same area, so if they are the only weird creatures the GM plans to use in a horror game, there's no need for the Unease module.

In some ways, Unease is a more limited form of Instant Panic but can also be used in tandem with it.

The Special Cards page has Unease tokens that you can copy and give to the players to remind them that their characters are hindered by unease.

Medium-term benefits, page 239

Instant Panic, page 90

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This Cypher Short adventure is intended for GMs only.

For directions on how to run a Cypher Short: mymcg.info/cyphershorts

No one has any special equipment other than the typical camp stuff: mobile phone, toiletries, and a duffel bag with spare clothes. Give each PC two subtle cyphers.

NPC Name Ideas

Orlando, athlete
Laura Byrd, counselor
Chris Jones, counselor
Tess, nerd
Joe Gumm, mechanic
Bud, troublemaker

CAMP MYRTLE, HOBOKEN

The Premise: The characters are high school seniors and camp employees at a summer camp in the woods. There's a crazed slasher with an axe to grind hunting them for something their parents did a generation ago!

CHARACTER CREATION

The characters are just normal people. Some of them are attendees of the camp and some work there. Cypher Short character suggestions include:

Athlete: This is probably someone with the Performing Physical Actions type. The player decides the character's name, a brief personality, and what sport they play. They have a couple of pieces of sports equipment (helmet and football, baseball and glove, and so on).

Counselor: The Talking type would work well for this character. The player decides the character's name, brief personality, and why they're a counselor (loves the wilderness, wanted work experience, needed money, and so on). They have a portable radio, a flashlight, and a lighter.

Nerd: This is probably someone with the Searching and Discovering type. The player decides the character's name, brief personality, and what their favorite nerd interest is (anime, comics, and so on). They have an action figure, book, or some other non-electronic item of fandom.

Mechanic: This is probably a Searching and Discovering type of character. The player should decide the character's name, brief personality, and their responsibilities at camp (fixing and driving the bus, repairing the cabins, and so on). They have keys to the bus and all the cabins, a flashlight, and a set of light and heavy tools.

Troublemaker: This is probably someone with the Sneaking type. The player should decide the character's name, brief personality, and why they're at the camp (parents MIA, probation, and so on). They have some improvised lockpicks and a lighter.

THE SETUP

The characters are at (fictional) Camp Myrtle in a national park a few miles from the small town of Hoboken. The camp employees know each other, the camp guests know each other, and the counselors and guests know each other. The camp is a semicircle of cabins around the western end of a lake that connects to swampy waterways throughout the park. It's just after dark on the last night of summer camp, and everyone is outside waiting for the counselors to make skillet cookies for dessert. Suddenly there is a crack of thunder, a light rain starts to fall, and the noise of the generator stops. The only source of illumination is from the campfire.

The Counselor and the Mechanic know that the generator for the cabins is finicky—this happens at least once each summer. The Mechanic knows it usually takes ten minutes to an hour to get it running again.

The PCs don't know it yet, but there's a killer on the loose—he was bullied by other campers long ago and now is a survivalist who wants revenge. He cut the power from the generator and sabotaged the bus.

Other facts:

- There's (probably) nobody else within earshot of this campground.
- Wandering around outside the campground in the dark is slow, wet, difficult, uncomfortable, and full of pests. Even the dirt road to town might be flooded in places.

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- Phones get no reception here.
- Parents are scheduled to pick up everyone at noon the next day.

POSSIBLE ENCOUNTERS

Generator: The valve connecting the tank to the generator has been broken and the area stinks of propane. It'll take ten minutes to fix, but it should be aired out for about ten more minutes to make sure it doesn't ignite when started again. Open flame near here before it is aired out ignites the propane, inflicting damage to anyone in short range who fails a Speed defense roll.

Bus: The bus won't start because several wires have been cut. Repairs would take about an hour.

Sleeping Cabin: Largest of the cabins, with enough double bunk beds to sleep twelve people.

Kitchen Cabin: A small cabin with a sink, propane stove, and walk-in pantry.

Bathroom: A utilitarian space divided in two, each side with three toilet stalls and a communal shower.

Storage Cabin: Has miscellaneous repair supplies and a small sleeping area for the Mechanic.

Lake Cabin: Has a couple of two-person canoes and oars.

Lone Camper: Chris, a solitary hiker roughing it in another part of the national park, wanders into Camp Myrtle to take shelter from the rain.

GM INTRUSIONS

Some of these GM intrusions might be triggered using the shock rule.

Explosion! A propane explosion catches a cabin on fire. This intrusion can happen to any of the buildings at any time. Anyone within short range of the explosion (inside or outside) must make a Speed defense roll or take 4 points of damage from debris and fire (even those who succeed take 2 points of damage). The ongoing fire automatically inflicts damage each round to anyone within immediate range, and if it's not extinguished by the fifth round after the explosion, the cabin can't be saved.

Ongoing fire: *level 3*

Snare: A character triggers a snare built by the killer. Anyone who triggers it must make a Speed defense roll or get knocked prone, dragged a short distance away (taking 2 points of damage), and held upside down off the ground. All tasks are hindered while they're snared. The murderer might kill them or use them as bait to catch another person. (The Counselor recognizes the knots as something taught at Camp Myrtle.)

Snare: *level 4*

Propane explosion: *level 4*

Bait: The murderer has tied someone to a tree, propane tank, or other heavy object and left them in an obvious place for others to find. When someone approaches the victim to free them, the murderer attacks. (The Counselor recognizes the knots as something taught at Camp Myrtle.)

Rope bindings: *level 5*

Scary Noise: Someone is startled by a loud crash or strange noise in the darkness. If they don't move, a large raccoon or possum runs by. If they approach the area of the noise, they see a raccoon, possum, snake, or small alligator eating some food that was left out. These animals aren't aggressive but defend or run away if attacked.

Possum or raccoon: *level 1*

Small alligator: *level 2*

Snake: *level 1*

The Killer: The killer attacks from ambush, or a character spots him creeping from one area to the next. He wears green camouflage and combat boots, and his face is covered in military camo paint. He prefers attacking solos or pairs. A GM intrusion allowing him to get away from aggressive PCs means they can encounter him again somewhere else. Eventually, he's going to burn down all of the cabins.

Chris: *level 2, fishing as level 3*

Killer: *level 5; health 15; Armor 1; damage 8; attacks with fire axe, knife, or rope*

THE CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the PCs must try to survive until noon the next day when their parents and/or friends arrive to take them home. The murderer continues to pursue them until just after dawn, at which point he gives up on any remaining PCs and slips away.

Optional Rule: Shock, page 282

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This Cypher Short adventure is intended for GMs only.

For directions on how to run a Cypher Short: mymcg.info/cyphershorts

THE BANDER HOUSE

The Premise: The characters are people staying overnight in a supposedly haunted house. The group's goals are to see if it really is haunted, find a specific object left behind for the heir (such as an official will), and perhaps find something valuable or concrete proof of ghosts; individual PCs may have additional personal goals.

CHARACTER CREATION

No one has any special equipment other than typical stuff: mobile phone, car keys, wallet. Give each PC two subtle cyphers.

The characters are just normal people—no mutants, superheroes, or time travelers. Cypher Short character suggestions include:

Heir: Has a personal connection to the house. This is probably someone with the Searching and Discovering type. The player decides the character's name, brief personality, and how they're connected to the house (inheritance, knows someone who died there, or the like). Their goal is to find a specific object left behind for them (such as a will or deed). They have a lighter and keys to the doors.

Protector: Watches over another PC (perhaps an Heir or the Medium). This is probably someone with the Performing Physical Actions type. The player decides the character's name, a brief personality, and which character they're trying to protect (and why). Their goal is to make sure their watched-over PC survives. They have a flashlight and a pistol.

Medium: Sensitive to the presence of spirits. The Talking type would work well for this character. The player decides the character's name, brief personality, and how their sensitivity works (sight, hearing, smell, and so on). Their goal is to drive out hostile spirits or aid suffering ones. They have a candle, matches, a notebook for automatic writing, and a spirit board.

Parapsychologist: Uses technology to find ghosts and frauds. This is probably a Searching and Discovering type of character. The player should decide the character's name, brief personality, and their goal for visiting the house (hoping for proof, skepticism, and so on). They have a digital video camera, electromagnetic field detector, tape recorder, and flashlight.

Optional Rule: Shock, page 282

Scary chair: *level 2*

THE SETUP

It's sundown and the characters are all at Bander House, a supposedly haunted two-story family house built in the Depression era. They all agreed to spend the night to either communicate with the ghosts or prove that it's not being haunted. Some of the characters may know each other but others might only have met earlier that day. The house is at the end of a private road in a lightly forested area outside the nearest town.

Other facts the characters don't automatically know:

- The house is haunted. A murder took place here decades ago.
- One of the PCs is related to a victim or the murderer (or both). The GM decides if this character or any other has a strong connection with the good and evil in the house. The connected character's actions are eased or hindered when interacting with the spirits, as appropriate to the nature of their connection.
- The house still has furniture and various personal items left in it.
- All supernatural events are limited to within a short distance of the house.
- Anyone who is part of a scary nonphysical event must make an Intellect defense roll or take Intellect damage.
- Destroying the house is not an option (it's valuable, it's a historical site, and so on).
- The characters don't have the ability to directly harm any of the ghosts.
- Phone reception gets erratic within the house.
- The house's rooms are: foyer, living room, dining room, sitting room, master bedroom, bedrooms (3), bathroom, library, cellar, attic, and porch.

POSSIBLE ENCOUNTERS

These encounters could happen in any room. The PCs seeing horrible things can trigger the shock rule.

Rocking Chair: This chair starts rocking on its own, and there's a scent of aftershave and hard alcohol in the air. The chair quietly slides closer to the characters when nobody

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is looking at it. If someone sits in the chair, there is a sensation of anger, followed by feet stomping out of the room and the door slamming shut.

Mysterious Walking Figure: A shadowy or translucent human figure appears, dressed in clothes from another time period and smelling of hard liquor. It tries to interact with a character in an ambiguous fashion, leaving cold, bloody handprints on them. It vanishes if threatened or after a few rounds of visibility.

Bloody Walls: A dark stain on one wall seems to be spreading. At other times it is completely gone.

Crying Child: Characters hear (and may even see) a crying child in several parts of the house. The child has a negative reaction to one specific character, alternating between looking hateful and frightened.

Locked Doors: All the doors to the room slam shut and lock. The doors and windows begin to rattle, the room gets cold, and there is the sound of distant screams. The disturbance keeps getting worse, but it suddenly stops if one of the doors is opened.

Mirror Scare: An antique mirror is covered with a sheet. Tapping and mumbling noises are coming from under the sheet. Looking in the mirror shows the room as it was years ago, a ghostly person talking to the viewer as if through a window, and a shadowy figure creeping about behind them.

GM INTRUSIONS

Hallucination Escape: Things start flying around the room, something screams "GET OUT!" and invisible fingernails start to wound the characters (1 point of damage each round). These incidents pursue them toward the main entrance as the walls start to bleed and the floor starts to buckle. They end if someone falls unconscious or flees outside the house (all damage is recovered, though the PCs still have faint bruises and scratches), at which point it's not clear if any of it was real.

Possession: The hostile entity in the house attempts to possess someone, trying different people until it succeeds. The possessed person scratches their own face (inflicting 2 points of damage), threatens everyone else, throws objects, and leaps on someone before collapsing and waking as if nothing happened.

Possession: *level 4*

Séance: If the characters perform a séance using automatic writing or a spirit board, messages from the spirits of the house include "HELP ME," "HE IS ANGRY AGAIN," "MY HIDING SPOT," "RUN RUN RUN," "LET ME GO," "DRINKING," and some gibberish. The spirits may also rattle the table, pull at characters' chairs, and mess with the lighting.

Trying a séance without using automatic writing or a spirit board has less clear results but should still give the characters some spooky information.

Ghost hands: *level 3*

Weird stain: *level 1*

Dog: The sound of a dog growling and barking gets louder as one PC approaches part of the room. Eventually the character feels something bite their ankle and is dragged out of the room and into an adjacent area when the dog ghost suddenly gives a painful yelp and vanishes. (This dragging might be a hostile act or a rescue, depending on the character's association with the house.)

Child haunt: *level 2*

Dog ghost: *level 3*

Locked door: *level 3*

The Odor and Skeleton: Everyone senses a foul odor in the room, and one character (to whom the house is hostile) feels nauseous. The odor increases and the characters can find the spot it's coming from, such as in a fireplace, under the floorboards, or behind a false wall. Breaking into that area reveals a shriveled skeletal corpse wrapped in a blanket. Its presence sickens the nauseated character, and miscellaneous haunting effects follow it. One character allied with the house may be attacked by thrown objects or invisible knives. If the corpse is buried outside, the haunting stops.

Mirror: *level 2*

Hostile presence: *level 4*

THE CONCLUSION

The PCs want to get evidence that the house is haunted, find a way to help the spirits trapped there, find the specific object, and survive the night.

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VALIANT COUNTY HOSPITAL

This Cypher Short adventure is intended for GMs only.

For directions on how to run a Cypher Short: mymcg.info/cyphershorts

The Premise: The characters are people in a hospital when a zombie outbreak occurs on the ground floor, trapping the PCs inside.

CHARACTER CREATION

The characters are just normal people—some are patients in the hospital, some are visitors, and some are hospital staff. Cypher Short character suggestions include:

Patient: This could be a character of any type. The player decides the character's name, a brief personality, what they do for a living, and why they're in the hospital (broken arm, concussion, recent surgery, chronic illness, and so on). They have something to deal with boredom (a book, handheld videogame, or the like), a small gift (such as flowers or a box of chocolate), 3 points of lasting damage, and 1 additional XP.

Visitor: This could be a character of any type. The player decides the character's name, brief personality, what they do for a living, and who they're visiting in the hospital (perhaps another PC or an NPC). They have vending machine snacks and a small gift for the patient.

Doctor or Nurse: This is probably someone with the Searching and Discovering type. The player decides the character's name, brief personality, and what their medical specialty is (cardiology, radiology, obstetrics, surgery, and so on). They have a stethoscope, pager, and two minor pieces of medical equipment (such as a thermometer, bandage scissors, gauze, or hand sanitizer).

Technician: This is probably a Searching and Discovering type of character. The player should decide the character's name, brief personality, and their responsibilities at the hospital (using medical machines, fixing the air conditioning or plumbing, running the front desk, and so on). They have keys to parts of the hospital and light tools appropriate to their job.

THE SETUP

The characters are all at Valiant County Hospital in a small city. It's 8 p.m. on a Tuesday, thirty minutes before the end of visiting hours. The doctors, nurses, and other hospital staff PCs probably know each other to some extent, the nurses probably know the patients and perhaps a visitor, and the patients and visitors may know each other.

Unknown to the PCs, bright lights outside resembling falling stars (perhaps a meteor shower or a satellite burning up in orbit) start to streak across the sky. Many people watching these lights experienced nausea (as with the onset of a migraine), and within minutes they passed out. Ambulances brought some of these people from nearby locations to Valiant, at which time the people revived as meteor zombies—undead creatures with green glowing eyes and mouths, a craving for human flesh, and the ability to transmit their condition to anyone they bite.

Start the session with the PCs near each other on the third floor (where the surgery and patient areas are), perhaps in the same or adjacent rooms. After the players have a couple of minutes to chat in character about normal hospital things, the building fire alarm goes off (accidentally activated by someone in a ground-floor emergency room), which is the first sign that something is amiss.

General facts:

- The other rooms on the third floor either are empty or have NPC patients, some of whom can't be moved. It might be safer to lock them in until the danger is over.
- The second floor has offices, the cafeteria, and diagnostic machines.
- The first floor has emergency rooms and the admitting desk.
- The underground parking garage has a ramp leading up to the surface. It's connected to the other floors by stairs and an elevator.
- Sharp surgical tools are light weapons. PCs might be able to find a fire axe on each floor that is a medium weapon. The cafeteria has some large knives that are light weapons.

POSSIBLE ENCOUNTERS

Stairwell: Two stairwells connect to all floors. Some of the doors might open onto an area filled with meteor zombies, and some might be blocked by bodies, furniture, or something else large and heavy. If the

Meteor zombies: *level 3, Speed defense as level 2; health 12; damage inflicted 3 points; an attack that would kill it does so only if the attack roll was an even number (otherwise it is only reduced to 1 health)*

Lasting damage, page 436

Lasting damage examples:

Injured arm, hinders tasks with that arm

Injured leg, half movement speed

Concussion, hinders Intellect tasks

Abdominal surgery, hinders Speed tasks

Chronic illness, hinders Might tasks

No character has any special equipment other than personal items: mobile phone, keys, wallet, and so on. Give each PC two subtle cyphers.

If appropriate, describe unoccupied areas on other floors as having bloodstains or partially eaten dead people.

Heavy door obstacle: *level 4*

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fire sensor is triggered somewhere, the sprinkler in the stairwell may make the stairs slippery.

Elevators: The elevators are supposed to automatically return to the ground floor in an emergency, and thereafter won't rise without a doctor or nurse's key. If the PCs use a key to bring the elevator to the second or third floor, it's likely that the elevator doors open and release a couple of meteor zombies from the first floor (they were bitten, then hid in the elevator, then turned into zombies).

Falling Stars: The weird lights are still happening outside, and anyone who sees them must make an Intellect defense roll each round or start feeling nauseous (which eventually leads to unconsciousness and zombification). Closing or averting your eyes counts as an asset on this roll, but hinders other tasks that require looking in the general direction of the lights. Glass (including windowpanes and car windshields) blocks the dangerous effect of the lights, so remaining indoors or in a closed car is safe. Wearing spectacles made of glass (not plastic) only provides an asset against the effect of the light. Daylight drowns out the light, preventing it from affecting people. PCs who try to escape the hospital by breaking a window, going on the roof, or going directly outside from the first floor doors will have to deal with the dangerous lights.

Hiding Survivor: The PCs find or hear Terry, who found a secure hiding place and has been safely avoiding the meteor zombies so far. Terry is frightened and doesn't want to leave their hiding spot, but a persuasive PC can talk them into it.

Parking Garage: The parking garage is a bit chaotic from crashed cars and a few roaming zombies. A PC with a car here should be able to lead everyone to it and (after dealing with an obstacle or combat encounter) drive away from the hospital and find safe ground elsewhere.

GM INTRUSIONS

Jammed Lines: Phones still work but emergency lines quickly become jammed, and emergency responders are overwhelmed dealing with similar issues all over the city, so it's unlikely they'll be able to rescue the PCs.

Stuck Elevator: If the PCs try to take an elevator to another floor (using a doctor or nurse's key if necessary), it gets stuck partway between two floors. They can force the doors open and crawl out onto a different floor, but each PC is hindered by two steps for one round while squeezing through the narrow space (which would be a good time for a GM intrusion of meteor zombies arriving).

Secretly Bitten: An NPC with the group suddenly passes out at an inopportune time because they were hiding the fact that they'd been bitten. Soon, they'll rise as a meteor zombie.

Animated Corpse: The eyes and mouth of a partially eaten corpse begin to glow green. On the next round, it animates as a meteor zombie. Seeing this might also trigger the shock rule.

Infected: A meteor zombie's bite briefly makes the character's wound glow, infecting them with a level 5 disease; the infected must make a Might defense roll every ten minutes or move one step down the damage track. Characters killed by the disease animate as meteor zombies.

Meteor Zombie Pack: No matter where the PCs go, they eventually find a group of meteor zombies, who immediately attack and attempt to eat them (or some zombies find the PCs, with similar results). These zombies might be patients, friends of patients, or hospital employees—all potentially people the PCs once knew.

THE CONCLUSION

The PCs "win" this scenario if all zombies on the ground floor (approximately fifteen of them) are killed, if they survive in the hospital until daylight, or if they get to the parking garage and drive away from the hospital. Whether the meteor zombie outbreak is still a problem remains to be seen . . .

Slippery stairs: *level 2*

Weird lights: *level 2*

Adrenaline/epinephrine or a strong stimulant may be able to wake an unconscious person and delay transformation into a meteor zombie.

Optional Rule: Shock, page 282

Terry: *level 2, resisting intimidation and persuasion as level 3, one other useful skill as level 3*

Other possible survivors include Alex, Charlie, Drew, Kelly, Pasha, Rowan, and Sandy. Use Terry's stats for all survivors.

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This chapter is intended for GMs only.

Understanding the Listings, page 312

Chapter 22: Creatures, page 312

Chapter 23: NPCs, page 372

Cryptids are covered in the survival horror genre.

The creatures and NPCs in this chapter are provided to help you populate your horror game.

The most important element of each creature or NPC is its level. You use the level to determine the target number a PC must reach to attack or defend against the opponent. In each entry, the difficulty number for the creature or NPC is listed in parentheses after its level. The target number is three times the level.

The target number is usually also its health, which is the amount of damage it can sustain before it is dead or incapacitated. For easy reference, the entries always list health, even when it's the normal amount for a creature or NPC of its level. For more detailed information on level, health, combat, and other elements, see the Understanding the Listings section in the *Cypher System Rulebook*.

CREATURES AND NPCS BY LEVEL AND GENRE

Level	Name	Genre
2	Hivemind child	Aliens, dark magic, science gone wrong
2	Skeleton*	Comedy horror, dark magic, demons, zombies
3	Cannibal	Comedy horror, cryptids, dark magic, degenerates, zombies
3	Nightgaunt	Aliens, cryptids, Lovecraftian
3	Vampire, transitional*	Degenerates, science gone wrong, vampires
3	Vat reject*	Doppelgangers, science gone wrong, simulacra
3	Zombie*	Degenerates, Lovecraftian, science gone wrong, zombies
4	Deep one*	Lovecraftian
4	Devil*	Dark magic, demons
4	Ghost*	Ghosts, dark magic, J-horror/K-horror
4	Ghoul*	Cryptids, degenerates, Lovecraftian, zombies
4	Grey*	Aliens, doppelgangers, science gone wrong
4	Mad scientist	Aliens, body horror, comedy horror, demons, doppelgangers, Lovecraftian, science gone wrong, simulacra, werewolves, zombies
4	Werewolf*	Degenerates, science gone wrong, slashers, survival horror, werewolves
5	Cryptic moth	Cryptids
5	Demon*	Dark magic, demons, J-horror/K-horror
5	Fallen angel*	Dark magic, demons
5	Ichthysian	Comedy horror, cryptids, science gone wrong
5	Killer clown*	Clowns, comedy horror, killer toys, slashers
5	Killing white light*	Aliens, Lovecraftian, science gone wrong
5	Mi-go*	Aliens, body horror, cryptids, Lovecraftian
5	Replicant*	Doppelgangers, simulacra
5	Wendigo*	Cryptids, degenerates
5	Witch*	Dark magic, degenerates, demons
6	Mummy	Aliens, dark magic, mummies
6	Reanimated	Cryptids, science gone wrong, simulacra
6	Yithian	Aliens, doppelgangers, Lovecraftian
6	Vampire*	Degenerates, science gone wrong, vampires
6	Xenoparasite*	Aliens, body horror, science gone wrong
7	Fundamental angel	Demons, science gone wrong
7	Shoggoth	Aliens, body horror, Lovecraftian
8	Blob	Aliens, body horror, Lovecraftian, science gone wrong
8	Elder thing	Aliens, cryptids, Lovecraftian, science gone wrong

* Creature found in the *Cypher System Rulebook*

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BLOB 8 (24)

The huge, undulating mass of this creature is composed of a mucus-like solid. The half-amorphous blob defeats its foes by absorbing prey, integrating a victim's tissue into its own. In essence, the victim becomes the blob, and all of the victim's knowledge is available to the blob for later use.

If it later desires, a blob can release a nearly perfect replicant of any creature that it has absorbed. Replicants have the memories and personalities of the originals, but they do the blob's bidding, which is usually to explore distant locations or lure prey into the open using a friendly face. A particularly well-crafted replicant might not know it's not the original. Creating a replicant takes a blob a day or two of effort, during which time it's unable to defend itself or eat, so it's not a task the creature attempts lightly.

Motive: Assimilation of all flesh
Environment: Anywhere
Health: 66
Damage Inflicted: 8 points (acid gout)
Movement: Immediate; immediate when burrowing
Modifications: Speed defense as level 5 due to size
Combat: The blob can project a gout of acid at short range against a single target.

Though slow, a blob is always moving forward. A character (or two characters next to each other) within immediate range of a blob must succeed on a Might defense roll each round or be partly caught under the heaving mass of the advancing creature. A caught victim adheres to the blob's surface and takes 10 points of damage each round. The victim must succeed on a Might defense roll to pull free. A victim who dies from this damage is consumed by the blob, and their body becomes part of the creature.

If a blob has absorbed living flesh within the last hour, it regenerates 3 points of health per round while its health is above 0.

Interaction: A blob's favored method of communication is to absorb whoever tries to interact with it. If a replicant is handy, the blob might talk through it if the blob can touch the replicant and use it like a puppet.

Use: The old man the PCs accidentally hit with their vehicle has a weird, mucus-like growth on one hand (in addition to the damage he sustained in the accident). He probably should be taken to the hospital to have his injuries and the quivering growth looked at.

Loot: A blob might have several cyphers swirling about in its mass that it uses to equip replicants.

GM intrusion: *The character pulls free of a blob they were caught under, but a piece of quivering protoplasm remains stuck to their flesh. They must do serious damage to themselves (enough to incapacitate) within the hour, scraping off the protoplasm before it absorbs them and becomes a new mini-blob.*

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CRYPTIC MOTH 5 (15)

Normal moths are enigmatic, gauzy haunts of twilight. The feathery touch of their wings on your face can startle, even frighten. This is to be expected, since moths are the children of cryptic moths, malign and intelligent entities of another realm. Sometimes referred to as mothmen, other times as shadow faeries, cryptic moths are certainly alien. Each possesses a unique wing pattern and coloration, and, to some extent, body shape. These patterns and colors may signify where in the hierarchy a particular cryptic moth stands among its siblings of the night, but for those who do not speak the language of moths, the complexity of their social structure is overwhelming.

Motive: Capture humans, possibly for food, possibly for breeding purposes

Environment: Almost anywhere, usually at night

Health: 23

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Movement: Short; long when flying

Modifications: All knowledge tasks as level 6; stealth tasks as level 7 while invisible

Combat: Cryptic moths usually enter combat only when they wish, because until they attack and become visible, they can remain unseen and invisible to most eyes.

The touch of a cryptic moth's wing draws life and energy from targets, inflicting 5 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor).

Cryptic moths regain 1 point of health per round while their health is above 0, unless they've been damaged with a silvered or cold iron weapon, or by electrical attacks.

Moth swarm: *level 2*

Once every hour or so, a cryptic moth can summon a swarm of normal moths to aid them in combat or, more often, serve as a fashion accessory or component in a piece of living art.

If a cryptic moth is prepared, it may carry cyphers useful in combat, and perhaps even an artifact.

GM intrusion: *The cryptic moth grabs the character and flies up and away, taking the victim with them.*

Interaction: Although very few cryptic moths speak human languages, peaceful interaction with these creatures is not impossible. It's just extremely difficult, as they see most humans as a source of food or bodies to lay their eggs in.

Use: A character is followed by a cryptic moth intent on capturing and enslaving them.

Loot: A cryptic moth usually has a few cyphers, and possibly a delicate artifact.

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ELDER THING 8 (24)

Elder things are mostly extinct, but a few remain trapped in the Antarctic ice or rule over crumbling cities in deep trenches at the bottom of the ocean.

Beholding an elder thing bends the mind to the point of breaking. An elder thing has a great barrel-like body standing some 8 feet (2 m) tall. Knobby protrusions in the crown and base each unfold five appendages that recall the arms of a starfish. When agitated, an elder thing unfolds a pair of wings that help it flutter a limited distance.

Motive: Reclaim absolute sovereignty

Environment: In arctic regions or deep underwater

Health: 30

Damage Inflicted: 6 points

Movement: Immediate; long when flying

Modifications: All tasks related to knowledge of magic or science as level 10; Speed defense as level 6 due to form

Combat: An elder thing can attack with five tentacles divided any way it chooses among up to three targets within immediate range. A target hit by a tentacle must also succeed on a Speed defense roll or become grabbed until it escapes. Each round, the elder thing automatically inflicts 6 points of damage on each grabbed target until the victim succeeds on a Might defense roll to escape.

An elder thing can reach into the mind of a target within short distance. If the target fails an Intellect defense roll, the elder thing reads their thoughts while the target remains within long distance. During this time, the elder thing knows everything the target knows, hindering the target's attack and defense rolls against the elder thing. The elder thing can use an action to rend the target's thoughts, which inflicts 6 points of Intellect damage on a failed Intellect defense roll. An elder thing can passively read the thoughts of up to two creatures at one time.

An elder thing also might carry a few cyphers and an artifact it can use in combat.

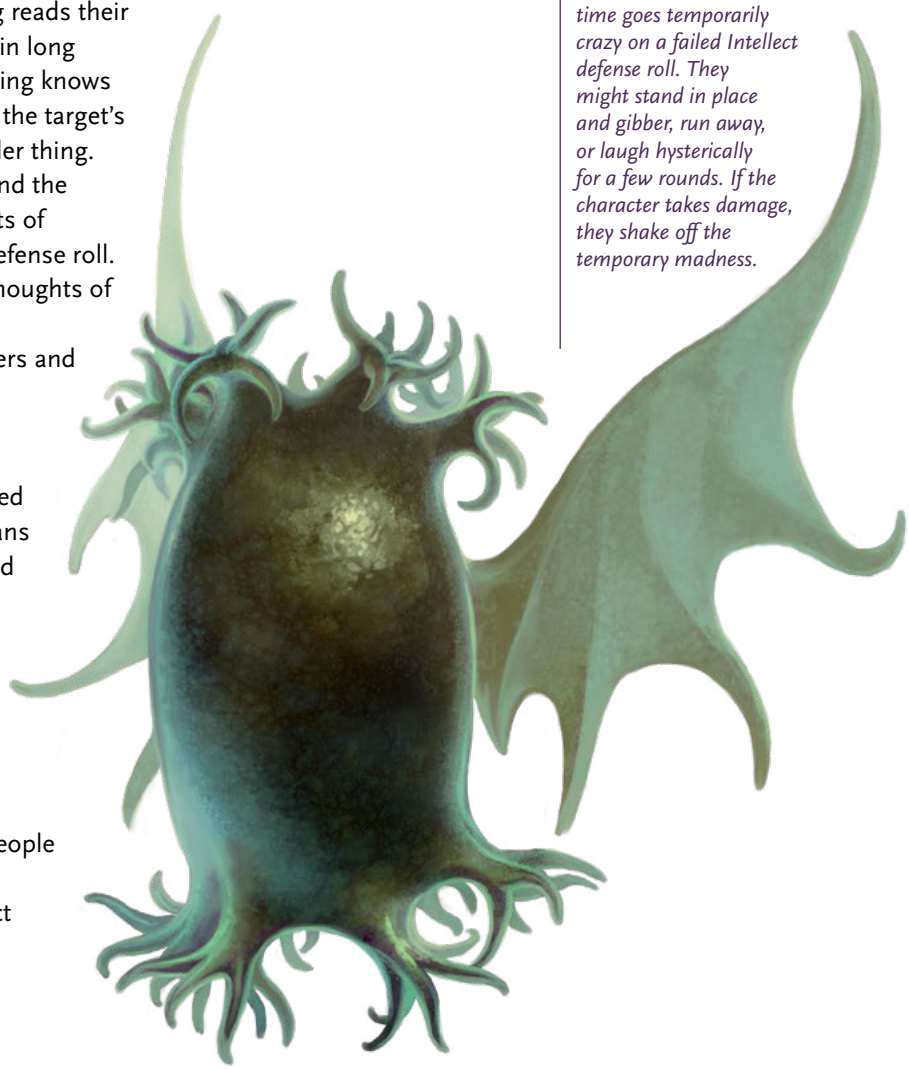
Interaction: An elder thing communicates through whistles and pops created by moving air through tiny orifices arranged around its body. Elder things see humans as a lesser form of life and may demand worship, sacrifices, or something else from people it encounters.

Use: Fishermen return to a coastal village with a large block of ice in tow. In the ice is something dark and large—an elder thing frozen alive. If the thing thaws out, it will likely take over the community and enslave the people living there.

Loot: An elder thing usually has one artifact and two or three cyphers.

Meddling by elder things created multicellular life that spread across Earth billions of years ago and ultimately brought about humanity. As the younger species grew in numbers and influence, the elder things went into decline, a process hastened by wars against strange beings from other worlds and uprisings by the servitor race they created, the shoggoths. *Shoggoth, page 116.*

GM intrusion: *A character who sees an elder thing for the first time goes temporarily crazy on a failed Intellect defense roll. They might stand in place and gibber, run away, or laugh hysterically for a few rounds. If the character takes damage, they shake off the temporary madness.*



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FUNDAMENTAL ANGEL 7 (21)

Fundamental angels are mysterious holy beings that maintain and guard fundamental concepts of the universe, such as time, gravity, and energy. They have powers and agendas deriving from higher states of reality. They are strange, terrifying, and inconstant in form, unlike the relatively benign and comprehensible winged humanoids from religion and myth.

In the rare times when mortals interfere with these concepts, fundamental angels manifest in the world to set things right. They have intervened to destroy cataclysmic atomic weapons, power sources that skirt the rules of matter and energy, and life forms that betray the principles of creation.

Motive: Preserving the natural order

Environment: Anywhere, usually in response to mortal activity

Health: 35

Damage Inflicted: 8 points

Armor: 2 (+3 against energy)

Movement: Short; short when flying

Modifications: All knowledge as level 9; attacks against mad science and supernatural targets as level 8

Combat: A fundamental angel attacks other creatures by creating a long-range blast of bright divine energy that inflicts 8 points of damage. In addition, it automatically inflicts 4 points of damage each round against all creatures within short range, although it can shield itself with wings or other protrusions to negate this effect against individuals.

Any creature within long range that sees it and fails an Intellect defense roll becomes frightened unless the angel tells it (specifically or in general) not to be afraid.

As an action, it can teleport up to a hundred miles away or transport itself fully to its native dimension where it exists as pure thought and spirit.

Interaction: A fundamental angel operates on a mental and metaphysical level far above humans and doesn't bother to explain itself to anyone other than its targets. It goes out of its way to not harm innocent creatures. It can communicate with any creature that uses language.

Use: "FEAR NOT!" says the radiant being that appears out of nowhere. It ignores bystanders and uses a beam of energy to destroy a scientist and his experimental reactor.

Loot: Fundamental angels sometimes create or refresh subtle cyphers by their mere presence.

For the purpose of vampire aversions, the angel's direct and area attacks count as religious power or sunlight, whichever is worse for the vampire. *Aversions, page 164.*

GM intrusion: *A fundamental angel's successful attack also blinds its opponent, lasting until they make an Intellect defense roll (try once each round).*

GM intrusion: *A fundamental angel makes a second attack this round against a target that is adjacent to its primary target.*

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HIVEMIND CHILD 2 (6)

A hivemind family is a scouting expedition of part-alien creatures sent to study and infiltrate human society, either out of scientific curiosity or as a long-term plan for world domination or human extinction. Some entities might intercept human astronauts, reprogramming their DNA or attaching a parasite to their mind or soul. Others might send a machine to an isolated community, remotely impregnating some of the inhabitants to gestate and give birth at the same time. The end result is a group of hivemind children who have a psychic link, unusual powers, and loyalty to their inhuman creators.

Hivemind children often have a very similar appearance even if they have different parents—they might all have pale blond hair, unusually wide-set eyes, six fingers on one hand, or an odd posture. They eerily match each other's expressions and movements. They think and speak as children years older than they appear. Their emotional responses are muted to an almost sociopathic extent.

Depending on their origin, the weird children may be mentored or protected by an altered adult, or by human parents in denial about the monsters they care for.

Motive: Conquest, exploration, infiltration

Environment: Human settlements

Health: 6

Damage Inflicted: 2 points

Movement: Short

Modifications: Mental attacks and Intellect defense as level 3; defend against attacks from living creatures as level 3 due to mind reading; perception and scientific knowledge as level 4

Combat: Individually, hivemind children are physically no stronger or more durable than a typical human. Their true strength is in their ability to read and control minds. Their telepathic link means that if one of them knows something, all of them within long range automatically know it.

Hivemind children can automatically read the surface thoughts of anyone they can see within short range, even if the target is unwilling. As an action, they can force an intelligent living creature within short range to take a physical action, including something that would cause the target harm, such as forcing a target to stick their hand into boiling water, steer a moving car off a cliff, or shoot themselves with a pistol (if used as an attack, this inflicts damage equal to the hivemind child's level or the controlled creature's level, whichever is greater).

Two hivemind children within short range of each other automatically augment each other's mental powers, allowing them to read or control minds of two targets at once as a level 4 creature. Four within short range of each other can read or control minds of four targets at once as a level 5 creature, and eight or more can work together to read or control minds of eight people as a level 6 creature.

GM intrusion: *A group of hivemind children briefly manifest a teleportation or telekinesis ability at the same level as their mind control.*

GM intrusion: *The injury or death of one hivemind child angers the rest, increasing their level and damage by +2 for one round.*

Interaction: Hivemind children want to protect themselves and observe humans and will try to do so until they appear as old as adults. Their long-term goals are unclear but probably don't have humanity's best interests in mind.

Use: Children born after a scientific expedition are strange and different. Multiple small villages all over the world experience births of children with weird abilities.

Loot: Hivemind children may have no useful items or one weird science device they've built with their inhuman knowledge.

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ICHTHYSIAN 5 (15)

Ichthysians are thought to be aquatic evolutionary offshoots of hominids or the result of experiments trying to fuse human and amphibian or fish DNA. They are physically similar to humans standing fully upright, with webbed hands, claws, froglike or fishlike features, gills, and strong muscles from a lifetime of swimming. They live in the water but are comfortable with extended forays onto land. Their intelligence is between that of a smart animal and a human; they can use simple tools such as rocks and sticks, and may build dams to modify waterways in their territory.

Motive: Hunger for flesh, curiosity, solitude

Environment: Anywhere near bodies of fresh water

Health: 18

Some ichthysians are reputed to have the ability to heal others, and local villages may worship these beings as gods.

Damage Inflicted: 6 points

Armor: 2

Movement: Short on land; long in the water

Modifications: Strength-based tasks and swimming as level 6; defense against poison as level 3

Combat: Ichthysians attack with their powerful claws. They are less mobile on land and prefer to attack from the water. If overmatched, they would rather flee to deep, dark water than fight to the death.

An ichthysian regenerates 2 points of health each round as long as it starts the round with at least 0 health. This regeneration greatly extends their lifespan, and it is common for them to live to be more than two hundred years old.

Ichthysians are prone to mutation, especially in response to pollutants and other chemicals. These mutations might be physical deformities, but could be as strange as transparent flesh, poisonous skin, extra eyes with enhanced senses, or extra limbs.

Interaction: Ichthysians are not aggressive but will retaliate with full force against anything that attacks them, and one can remember specific enemy humans from its past.

Use: A cryptid fish-person has been spotted in the vicinity of a deforested area adjacent to a mighty river. Villagers tell stories of an ancient water god that heals sickness and grants wishes.

Loot: An ichthysian's lair might have a strange relic or device that works like a cypher or artifact.

GM intrusion: *A slain ichthysian suddenly regenerates 5 health and immediately attacks or tries to flee.*

GM intrusion: *The ichthysian suddenly mutates in response to an attack, thereafter gaining +2 Armor or +2 levels in defense against that type of attack.*

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MUMMY 6 (18)

Mummies are intelligent undead, usually royalty or members of the priesthood, risen from their burial places to destroy those who disturbed their rest. Many seek to undo wrongs against them from ages past or re-establish themselves in their former high stations.

Motive: Vengeance, love, power

Environment: Regions where mummification was common

Health: 24

Damage Inflicted: 7 points

Armor: 2

Movement: Short

Modifications: Climb, stealth, ancient history, and ancient religion as level 8

Combat: Mummies are strong, capable of lifting an adult human with one hand and throwing the person across a room. They attack with weapons that were buried with them or use their fists. A mummy usually has one or more of the following abilities:

Curse: Anyone who disturbs a mummy's tomb must make an Intellect defense roll or become cursed, which hinders their actions by two steps (forever, or until cured).

Disease: The mummy's attacks carry a rotting disease. The target must make a level 5 Might defense roll every twelve hours or take 5 points of ambient damage.

Lifelike appearance: A mummy can repair its body to assume a fully human appearance. This usually requires time and the flesh of several people, often those who awakened it.

Magic: Once per hour, the mummy can cast a spell from the Minor Wish character ability.

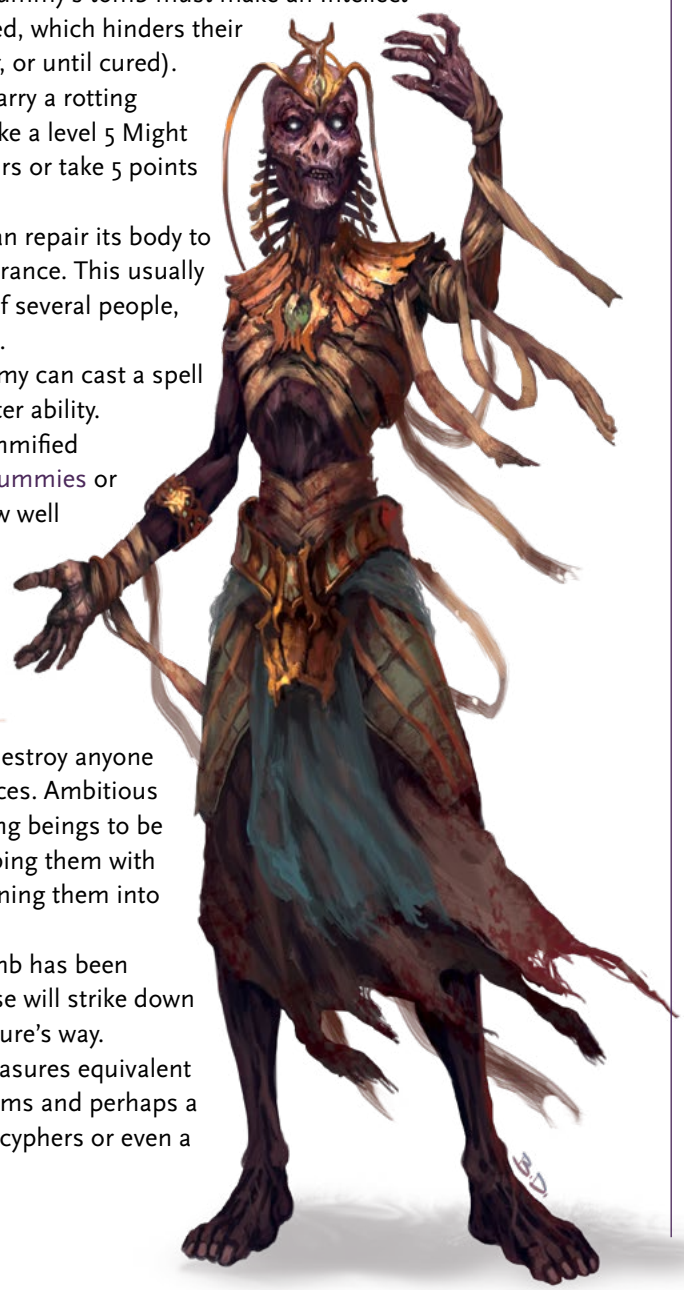
Minion: Animate up to four mummified bodies as mindless lesser mummies or skeletons (depending on how well the bodies are preserved), lasting for one day.

Swarm: Call a swarm of bugs (usually scarab beetles or scorpions) to attack a foe or obscure vision.

Interaction: Mummies want to destroy anyone who disturbs their burial places. Ambitious mummies might choose living beings to be their spies and servants, bribing them with funereal treasures or threatening them into submission.

Use: Villagers whisper that a tomb has been opened and a mummy's curse will strike down anyone who gets in the creature's way.

Loot: Mummies usually have treasures equivalent to three or four expensive items and perhaps a handful of magical manifest cyphers or even a magical artifact.



A powerful sorcerer-mummy might also be able to use spells from the Moderate Wish character ability.

Ambient Damage, page 217

Minor Wish, page 162

Moderate Wish, page 163

Skeleton, page 353

Lesser mummy: *level 3, climb and stealth as level 4; health 12; Armor 1*

Swarm of bugs: *level 3*

People often mummified animals as well as humans. To make an animal mummy, add +1 to its Armor and +3 to its health.

GM intrusion: *A dying mummy speaks a curse upon those who killed it, hindering all their actions by two steps (forever, or until cured).*

GM intrusion: *What was overlooked as a fake or a prop turns out to be an actual mummy and attacks a character.*

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NIGHTGAUNT 3 (9)

"Shocking and uncouth black things with smooth, oily surfaces, unpleasant horns that curved inward toward each other, bat wings whose beating made no sound, ugly prehensile tails that lashed needlessly and disquietingly. And worst of all, they never spoke . . . because they had not faces at all . . . but only a suggestive blankness where a face ought to be."

—H. P. Lovecraft, The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath

A nightgaunt's hands and feet have no opposable digits. All its fingers and toes can grasp with firm but unpleasant boneless strength. Hungry nightgaunts swoop out of the night, grab prey, and fly off into darkness. The creatures sometimes "work" for other agencies, though often enough, their goals are obscure.

Motive: Unknowable

Environment: Anywhere dark, usually in groups of four to seven

Health: 9

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Immediate; long when flying (short when flying with a victim)

Modifications: Perception and Speed defense as level 4; stealth as level 7

Combat: A nightgaunt can attack with its barbed tail. To catch a foe, a nightgaunt dives through the air from just outside of short range. When it does, it moves 100 feet (30 m) in a round and attempts to grab a victim near the midpoint of its movement. A target who fails a Speed defense roll (and who isn't more than twice the size of the nightgaunt) is jerked into the creature's boneless clutches and carried upward, finding themselves dangling from a height of 50 feet (15 m).

The nightgaunt automatically tickles grabbed victims with its barbed tail. This subtle form of torture hinders all the victim's actions by two steps.

Interaction: Nightgaunts never speak, and they ignore anyone who attempts to interact with them, whether the communication takes the form of commanding, beseeching, or frantically pleading. Such is the way of nightgaunts.

Use: Someone who bears one or more of the PCs a grudge discovers a tome of spells and summons a flight of nightgaunts, which set off in search of their prey.

Loot: One in three nightgaunts has a valuable souvenir from a past victim, which might be an expensive watch, a ring, an amulet, or sometimes a cypher.

GM intrusion: *The character is startled by the nightgaunt and suffers the risk of temporary dementia. On a failed Intellect defense roll, the character shrieks and faints (or, at the GM's option, babbles, drools, laughs, and so on). The character can attempt a new Intellect defense roll each round to return to normal.*

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REANIMATED 6 (18)

"I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me."

—Mary Shelley, Frankenstein

A reanimated is a humanoid creature patched together from corpses (or crafted directly from muscle, nerves, and sinew), then returned to life through a hard-to-duplicate series of electromagnetic induction events. Though made of flesh, a reanimated's return to consciousness and mobility is marked by a substantial increase in hardiness, resistance to injury, and longevity. On the other hand, the process usually obliterates whatever mind was once encoded in the donor's brain, giving rise to a creature of monstrous rage and childlike credulity. Sometimes the reanimated is bound to its creator in service, but such ties are fragile and could be snapped by an ill-timed fit of fury.

Motive: Defense, unpredictable

Environment: Anywhere in service to a mad scientist, or driven to the edges of civilization

Health: 70

Damage Inflicted: 7 points

Movement: Short; long when jumping

Modifications: Speed defense as level 4; interaction as level 2; feats of strength and toughness as level 8

Combat: A reanimated attacks foes with its hands. Any time a foe inflicts 7 or more points of damage on the reanimated with a single melee attack, the creature immediately lashes out in reactive rage and makes an additional attack in the same round on the foe who injured it.

If the reanimated begins combat within long range of foes but outside of short range, it can bridge the distance with an amazing leap that concludes with an attack as a single action. The attack inflicts 4 points of damage on all targets within immediate range of the spot where the reanimated lands.

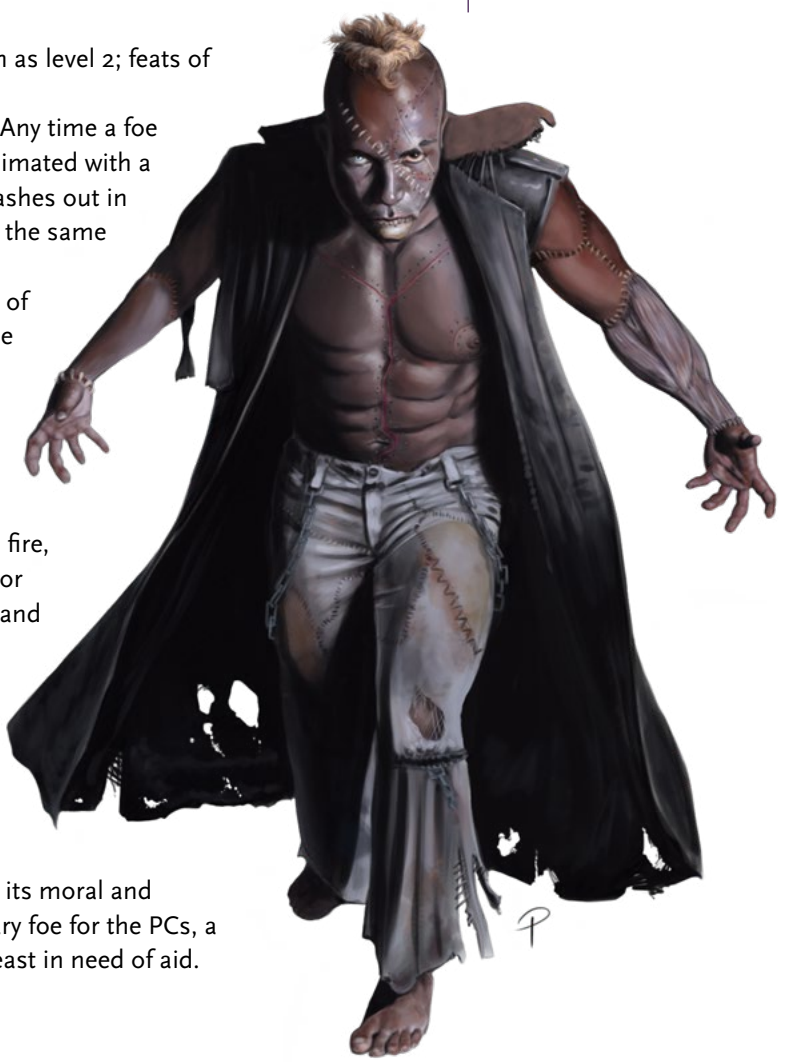
Some reanimated are psychologically vulnerable to fire, and they fear it. When these reanimated attack or defend against a foe wielding fire, their attacks and defenses are hindered by two steps.

If struck by electricity, a reanimated regains a number of points of health equal to the damage the electricity would normally inflict.

Interaction: Fear and food motivate a reanimated, though sometimes beautiful music or innocence can stay its fists.

Use: Depending on where a reanimated falls along its moral and psychological development, it could be a primary foe for the PCs, a secondary guardian to deal with, or a forlorn beast in need of aid.

GM intrusion: *The character's attack bounces harmlessly off the stitched, hardened flesh of the reanimated.*



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SHOGGOTH 7 (21)

Elder thing, page 109

Rumors abound of a few very rare, particularly intelligent shoggoths that intentionally reduce their own mass and learn to take on the forms of humans so they can integrate themselves into society (and prey upon humans at their leisure).

GM intrusion: *The character is engulfed in the shoggoth, their gear scattered throughout the thing's undulating form, and their body turned upside down so that escape attempts are hindered.*

"It was a terrible, indescribable thing vaster than any subway train—a shapeless congeries of protoplasmic bubbles, faintly self-luminous, and with myriads of temporary eyes forming and un-forming as pustules of greenish light all over the tunnel-filling front that bore down upon us, crushing the frantic penguins and slithering over the glistening floor that it and its kind had swept so evilly free of all litter."

—H. P. Lovecraft, At the Mountains of Madness

Shoggoths vary in size, but the smallest are usually at least 10 feet (3 m) across. They are the product of incredibly advanced bioengineering by some strange species in the distant past. They are angry, vicious predators feared by any who have ever heard of these rare creatures (or who have encountered them and somehow survived to tell the tale). They were created by the elder things but overthrew their masters and now roam the vast, ancient cities they have claimed for themselves.

Motive: Hungers for flesh

Environment: Anywhere

Health: 35

Damage Inflicted: 10 points

Armor: 10 against fire, cold, and electricity

Movement: Long

Modifications: Speed defense as level 6 due to size

Combat: Shoggoths sprout tendrils and mouths and spread their wide, amorphous forms, allowing them to attack all foes within immediate range. Those struck by a shoggoth's attack are grabbed and engulfed by the thing's gelatinous body and suffer damage each round until they manage to pull themselves free (engulfed creatures can take no other physical actions while they are caught). Each round of entrapment, one object in the victim's possession is destroyed by the foul juices of the amorphous horror.

Shoggoths regenerate 5 points of health each round. They have protection against fire, cold, and electricity.

Interaction: A shoggoth can't be reasoned with.

Use: The PCs find an ancient structure of metal and stone. Wandering through it, they note that every surface is clear of dirt and debris. Soon they discover why—a shoggoth squirms through the halls, absorbing everything it comes upon (and it fills the passages it moves down, floor to ceiling, wall to wall).

Loot: A shoggoth's interior might contain a cypher.

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YITHIAN 6 (18)

The yithians (also known as the Great Race of Yith) were immense wrinkly cones 10 feet (3 m) high, with a head, four limbs, and other organs spreading from the top of their body. They communicated by making noises with their hands and claws, and they moved by gliding their lower surface across a layer of slime, like a slug. Their civilization was destroyed a billion years before the present day, but they transported their minds into new bodies far in the future and may still be encountered observing the past (our present) by telepathically inhabiting human bodies.

Motive: Knowledge

Environment: Anywhere

Health: 22

Damage Inflicted: 6 points

Armor: 2

Movement: Short

Modifications: All knowledge as level 8; Intellect defense as level 7; Speed defense as level 5 due to size and speed

Combat: Although large and hardy, members of the Great Race are ill-suited to physical combat. If they must engage in melee, they use pincer-like claws. They almost always wield artifacts and cyphers, however, which makes them dangerous opponents. Assume that a yithian has one or more of the following abilities arising from advanced technology devices:

- Force field that grants them +3 Armor
- Mental field that gives them +4 Armor against any mental attack
- Ray emitter that inflicts 7 points of damage up to long range
- Cloaking field that renders them invisible for up to ten minutes
- Stun weapon with short range that makes the target fall unconscious for ten minutes

Yithians have the ability to transfer their consciousness backward or forward through time, swapping minds with a creature native to the era they wish to observe. A yithian inhabiting the body of another creature is in complete control of that body. A creature trapped in the body of a yithian must attempt Intellect-based tasks each time it wishes to exert control. For the most part, it is trapped in the yithian's body and is merely along for the ride.

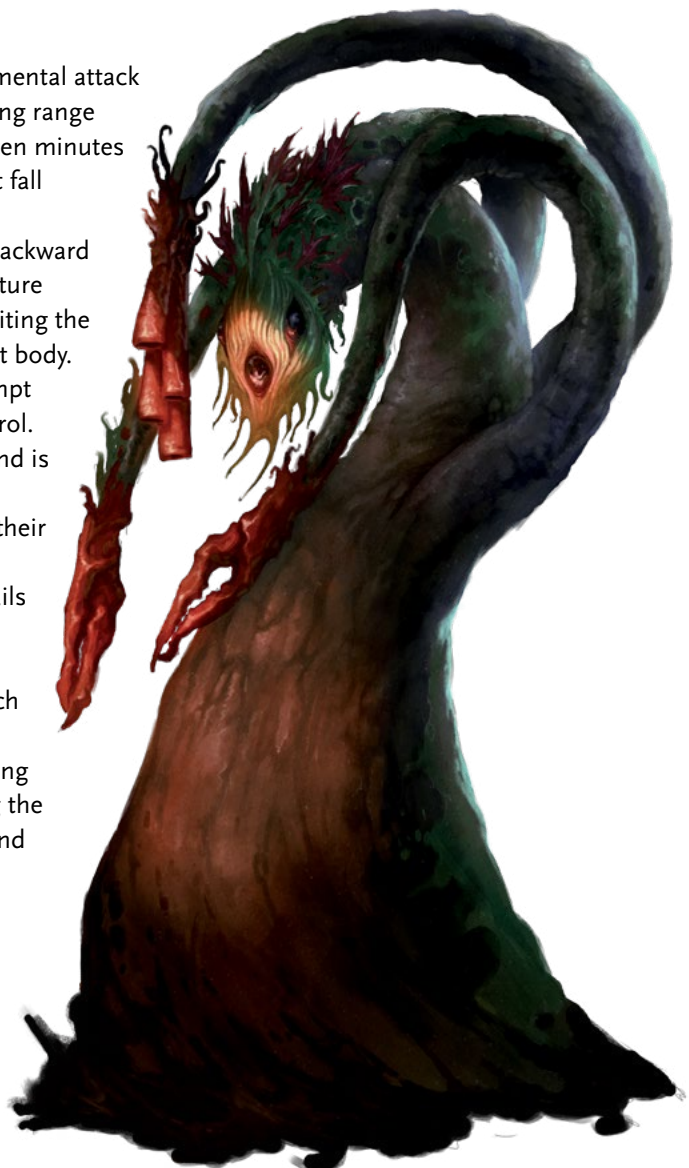
It's worth noting that the bodies the yithians use are not their original bodies, but instead the bodies of supremely ancient creatures that they inhabit. The Great Race hails originally from some extraterrestrial world.

Interaction: Yithians are not malicious, but they are quite focused and relatively uncaring about other races, such as humans.

Use: A yithian projects its mind across the aeons, swapping consciousnesses with the character. While controlling the character's body, the yithian is there mainly to learn and observe, and rarely takes any violent actions.

Loot: A yithian encountered in the flesh will have 1d6 manifest cyphers and very likely a technological artifact.

GM intrusion: *The yithian produces a cypher that has a function that is perfect for its current situation: a teleporter to get away, a protective field against precisely the kind of attack being used against it, or a weapon that exploits a weakness of the character's.*



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CANNIBAL 3 (9)

A cannibal is someone who has decided that eating other people is not only necessary but desirable. Whether this decision was forced by circumstance or made out of some secret, maladaptive urge, cannibals are dangerous because they hide in plain sight, pretending friendship and aid for strangers until their prey lowers their guard. That's when a cannibal strikes. Some cannibals like it raw; others delight in elaborate preparations.

Motive: Hungers for human flesh

Health: 12

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Movement: Short

Modifications: Deception, persuasion, intimidation, and tasks related to friendly interaction as level 6

Combat: Cannibals use whatever weapon is at hand. They usually don't attack unless they can surprise their prey. When cannibals have surprise, they attack as level 5 creatures and inflict 2 additional points of damage.

Interaction: Cannibals seem friendly and charming until they decide you are for dinner.

Use: Characters looking for a place to sleep, hide, or stay for the night are invited in by one or more cannibals—perhaps an entire family of them.

Loot: A cannibal has currency equivalent to a very expensive item and possibly a cypher.

Surprise, page 220

GM intrusion: *The cannibal reveals a severed and gnawed-upon body part of a previous victim. The character must succeed on an Intellect defense task or be stunned and lose their next turn.*

MAD SCIENTIST 4 (12)

A mad scientist is someone who delves into areas of science best left unexamined, abandoning ethics and pushing for what *can* be created without asking if it *should* be.

Motive: Understanding and exploiting reality

Environment: Usually in a lab

Health: 15

Damage Inflicted: 7 points

Movement: Short

Modifications: Defends as level 6 due to a gadget (or cypher); knowledge of advanced science as level 7

Combat: Mad scientists are usually accompanied by security guards, robots, zombies, or some other appropriate creature. A mad scientist can attempt to take command of an enemy's technological device (armor, a weapon, a cypher, a robot, and so on) within short range for up to one minute using a handheld device.

Mad scientists usually have access to a long-range energy or high-velocity weapon that inflicts 7 points of damage. They often carry manifest cyphers that increase Armor, confuse opponents' senses, or transform themselves into a form that eases all their actions by two steps.

Interaction: Mad scientists are narcissistic and love to monologue about their work. They negotiate but usually are sociopathic and don't care about other people. Some are filled with self-loathing but too far gone to feel they can change.

Use: Blackouts and strange noises have been traced to a location found to hold a secret lab where a scientist is creating something amazing and monstrous.

Loot: Mad scientists have a few manifest cyphers and possibly an artifact.

GM intrusion: *The mad scientist produces a gadget or cypher that proves to be the perfect answer to a dilemma at hand.*

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Many horror genres feature physical objects that the protagonists can use—alien devices, magical talismans, or mysterious objects with an unknown origin. This chapter describes examples of these objects as cyphers, which can be awarded like other manifest cyphers or in place of subtle cyphers. Unlike those in the *Cypher System Rulebook*, the manifest cyphers listed here include suggestions for what form the cypher takes (although in a game with magic, any of these cyphers might exist as a potion or spell on a scroll in addition to or instead of the forms listed here).

Most of these are marked as fantastic cyphers, although depending on the genre and circumstances of the game, they might be completely normal.

For your convenience, the cyphers have been organized into lists by horror genre or theme so you can randomly roll for something appropriate to your game without getting one that doesn't apply (such as a cypher against vampires in an alien invasion horror game). If you're running a game that mixes several genres, switch between lists each time you need to award a new manifest cypher.

This chapter is safe for both players and GMs to read.

Manifest Cyphers, page 379

Subtle Cyphers, page 378

Normal and Fantastic Effects, page 380

Alien Cyphers

1–2	Anathema siren (aliens)
3–4	Decapitative longevity
5–6	Horrific arm
7–8	Horrific eye
9–10	Horrific integrated weapon
11–12	Humanity tester
13–14	Invisibility revealer
15–16	Mind swapper
17–18	Primitive doppelganger
19–20	Visage scrutinizer

Body Horror Cyphers

1–2	Ascendant flesh vivisector
3–4	Decapitative longevity
5–6	Horrific arm
7–8	Horrific eye
9–10	Horrific face
11–12	Horrific integrated weapon
13–14	Horrific orifice
15–16	Insanity suppressor
17–18	Primitive doppelganger
19–20	Reanimator

Classic Monster Cyphers

1	Anathema siren (cryptids)
2	Anathema siren (mummies)
3–4	Anathema siren (undead)
5–6	Anathema siren (vampires)
7–8	Anathema siren (werewolves)
9	Ascendant brain vivisector
10	Ascendant flesh vivisector
11	Corrupted canopic jar
12	Decapitative longevity
13	Ghost detector
14–16	Invisibility serum
17	Reanimator
18–19	Silgarho infusion
20	Unphantomed limb

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Memorable Horror Moment: *When they're in the subway tunnels in* Cloverfield *and turn on the camera's night-vision setting so they can see in the dark.*

Dark Magic and Occult Cyphers

1–4	Anathema siren (demons)
5–7	Decapitative longevity
8–11	Homunculus flask
12–14	Mind swapper
15–17	Reanimator
18–20	Revenant serum

Demon Cyphers

1–4	Anathema siren (demons)
5–7	Horrific arm
8–10	Horrific face
11–13	Humanity tester
14–16	Reanimator
17–20	Visage scrutinizer

Ghost Cyphers

1–8	Anathema siren (ghosts)
9–20	Ghost detector

Lovecraftian Cyphers

1–2	Anathema siren (aliens)
3–4	Anathema siren (cryptids)
5–6	Anathema siren (extradimensional creatures)
7	Anathema siren (undead)
8–9	Horrific arm
10–11	Horrific eye
12–13	Horrific face
14–15	Horrific integrated weapon
16–17	Insanity suppressor
18–19	Invisibility revealer
20	Mind swapper

Mummy Cyphers

1–6	Anathema siren (mummies)
7–12	Corrupted canopic jar
13–16	Reanimator
17–20	Revenant serum

Science Gone Wrong Cyphers

1	Anathema siren (simulacra)
2	Ascendant brain vivisector
3	Ascendant flesh vivisector
4	Decapitative longevity
5	Ghost detector
6	Ghost trap
7	Homunculus flask
8	Horrific arm
9	Horrific eye
10	Horrific face
11	Horrific integrated weapon
12	Humanity tester
13	Insanity suppressor
14	Invisibility revealer
15	Invisibility serum
16	Mind swapper
17	Primitive doppelganger
18	Reanimator
19	Revenant serum
20	Unphantomed limb

Undead Cyphers

1–3	Anathema siren (ghosts)
4–6	Anathema siren (vampires)
7–9	Anathema siren (undead)
10	Decapitative longevity
11–12	Ghost detector
13	Ghost trap
14	Reanimator
15	Revenant serum
16–18	Silgarho infusion
19–20	Wolfsbane potion

Vampire Cyphers

1–6	Anathema siren (vampires)
7–12	Humanity tester
13–20	Silgarho infusion

Werewolf Cyphers

1–5	Anathema siren (werewolves)
6–10	Ascendant brain vivisector
11–15	Reanimator
16–20	Wolfsbane potion

Zombie Cyphers

1–8	Anathema siren (undead)
9–14	Reanimator
15–20	Revenant serum

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A SELECTION OF HORROR CYPHERS

ANATHEMA SIREN

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Amulet or device

Effect: Creates a strange and annoying noise about the volume of a human shouting. The noise is especially aggravating toward one type of creature; creatures of this type have all their actions hindered by two steps (hindered by three steps if the cypher level is 7 or higher) while within short range of the cypher. The user must use their action each round to manipulate the cypher for the noise and its effects to persist, or it goes silent and loses all power. The siren can be used for up to one minute per cypher level. Roll a d100 to determine what sort of creature is affected:

01–10	Aliens (probably one specific kind of alien)
11–16	Animate dolls and puppets
17–22	Cryptids
23–32	Demons
33–38	Doppelgangers
39–48	Ghosts
49–54	Mummies
55–64	Robots
65–70	Simulacra
71–80	Vampires
81–90	Werewolves (or some other werecreature)
91–95	Extradimensional creatures
96–00	Undead

ASCENDANT BRAIN VIVISECTOR

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Device, injection, or pill

Effect: If used on a beast whose level is less than the cypher level, this enhances connections in the beast's brain so it attains near-human intelligence and sapience, and gains a basic understanding of one specific language keyed to the cypher. The beast remembers its prior, simpler existence and understands that it has been made smarter. This transformation lasts for one day per cypher level, and then the beast reverts to its normal self slowly over the same number of days, often with violent and erratic outbreaks. For example, if the beast becomes smarter for five days, it loses intelligence gradually over days 6 through 9 and is back to normal on day 10. Additional uses of the cypher tend to have diminishing returns.

When used with an ascendant flesh vivisector, the resulting creature looks, thinks, and acts like a human.

Using this cypher on a beast whose level is too high might end up elevating its intelligence somewhat but also instigating aggressive behavior.

ASCENDANT FLESH VIVISECTOR

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Device, injection, or pill

Effect: If used on a beast of no larger than human size whose level is less than the cypher level, this radically alters the beast's shape so it resembles a human being. The beast-human still thinks and acts like a beast, but it looks like a human and can perform actions using its human dexterity (such as turning a doorknob or walking upright). This transformation lasts for one day per cypher level, but after an equal amount of time the beast reverts to its normal shape (in the manner described for the ascendant brain vivisector cypher). Additional uses of the cypher tend to have diminishing returns.

Using this cypher on a beast whose level is too high might end up temporarily transforming it into a human with bestial features.

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Corrupted Canopic Jar

Level: 1d6 + 1
Form: Jar made of clay or carved stone
Effect: Breaking open the jar (which destroys the preserved organs inside) permanently grants the user an asset (two assets if the cypher level is 6 or higher) on all attacks and defenses against mummies within short range.

Decapitative Longevity

Level: 1d6 + 4
Form: Injection or potion
Effect: Brings a dead creature's head (but not the body) back to life for a limited time as an undead creature. The cypher can be used up to an hour before or after death (in anticipation of dying or in response to someone's death) and requires up to ten minutes to take effect, at which time the creature recovers 1d6 + 6 points to their Pools. Because they are only a head, a PC reanimated this way has a maximum Might and Speed Pool of 3 each. The head has all the mental abilities they had when they were alive (including psychic or telepathic abilities) and can speak, but all their actions are hindered. They have the same appearance as before, except the wounds that killed them are still visible, and in general they have an unnatural look. They do not need to eat, drink, or sleep, but they can still rest if they want to (such as to make a recovery roll). The head remains in this active state for one day per cypher level, after which time it dies again and cannot be reanimated with this cypher.

When using a decapitative longevity cypher to bring a head back to life, it can be left attached to the inert body, or someone can carefully sever the head from the body, which doesn't harm the head.

Invisible target, page 221

Ghost Detector

Level: 1d6 + 1
Form: Amulet, crystal, or device
Effect: Automatically indicates if a ghost, spirit, or similar entity is within a short distance (a long distance if the cypher is level 6 or higher). If the user takes an action to study or focus their attention on the cypher, they can narrow down what quarter-arc of a circle the ghost is in. If the ghost is normally invisible, it becomes somewhat visible (hindering its stealth attempts by one step). The cypher remains active for ten minutes per cypher level.

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Ghost Trap

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Crystal or device

Effect: Can be thrown up to a short distance, where it releases a burst of transdimensional energy in an immediate area that absorbs ghosts (including spirits, phased beings, and similar creatures) but does not affect corporeal entities. PCs who meet these criteria must use an Intellect-based action (difficulty equal to the cypher level) to avoid being trapped. NPC ghosts are not affected if their level is higher than the cypher level. The trap holds the ghosts for up to one hour per cypher level, after which they automatically break free (and are probably very angry).

Ghosts in a trap can be permanently stored in a ghost vault. Ghost vault, page 130.

Homunculus Flask

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Ornate, opaque alchemical bottle filled with strange fluid

Effect: To activate this cypher, you must open the bottle, add a few fresh drops of your blood (inflicting 1 point of Might damage to you), stopper it again, and leave it alone for one day. When the bottle is next unstoppered, a hand-sized creature called a homunculus crawls out; it vaguely resembles you and serves you for one day per cypher level before dissolving into useless goo. Each time you give it an order, you must make an Intellect defense roll against it; if you fail, it becomes free to ignore your commands (but might pretend to be obedient so it can plot against you).

Homunculus: *level 2; alchemy, all defenses, and stealth as level 3*

Horrific Arm

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Injection or pill

Effect: The user's body rapidly grows a monstrous arm that is approximately the same size as one of their existing limbs. The arm is ugly and malformed, but fully functional. The user can use this arm as if it were one of their own. The new arm does not grant the user additional actions or attacks in a round, but it can be useful for carrying things. Damage to the arm does not affect the user (the arm can take 6 points of damage directed at it before it becomes nonfunctional). The arm lasts for one day per cypher level.

Horrific Eye

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Injection or spell

Effect: The user's body rapidly grows a monstrous eye (including a retractable eyestalk if the cypher level is 6 or higher) at the spot where the cypher is applied to their body. The user can see out of this eye as if it were one of their own (including any extraordinary vision-based senses the user normally has). The eye gives the user an asset on vision-based perception rolls, and depending on where it is located, it may allow the user to look around corners surreptitiously. Damage to the eye does not affect the user (the eye can take 1 point of damage directed at it before it becomes nonfunctional). The eye lasts for one day per cypher level.

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HORRIFIC FACE

Level: 1d6 + 1
Form: Injection or pill
Effect: The user rapidly grows a monstrous face (or an entire head if the cypher level is 6 or higher) somewhere on their body. The user can use the senses of this face and talk, breathe, and eat with it (for example, if their normal face is underwater or wrapped in plastic). The face gives the user an asset on perception rolls when its senses can be used—for example, it could hear someone sneaking up on the user, but it couldn't see them if its eyes were covered, and it can't help with identifying tastes unless its mouth is also used. Damage to the face does not affect the user (the face can take 3 points of damage directed at it before it becomes nonfunctional). Most people react with disgust to a creature with a visible extra face, hindering all interaction tasks. The face lasts for one day per cypher level (two days if the cypher is level 6 or higher).

Someone who fully understands how a horrific orifice cypher works might be able to program the user with new memories or control their mind by inserting data devices into the orifice.

HORRIFIC INTEGRATED WEAPON

Level: 1d6 + 3
Form: Weapon you can hold in one hand
Effect: The weapon extends tendrils, skin, wires, nerves, or other material into and through the user's hand, physically connecting itself to the user for one hour per cypher level. While connected, the user gains an asset on attacks with the weapon and cannot be disarmed, but cannot use that hand for anything except wielding the weapon. The user can detach or reattach the weapon by spending a full minute concentrating on its physical connection to their body. When the duration ends, the weapon detaches and becomes a normal weapon of its type. Roll a d20 to determine the kind of weapon:

1–4	Hunting knife
5–8	Machete
9–12	Nightstick
13–16	Light handgun
17–20	Medium handgun

The specific nature of a humanity tester depends on the setting and what sort of creatures are common. In a world with multiple kinds of creatures that pretend to be human, the tester might recognize all fakes or detect only one specific kind of fake.

HORRIFIC ORIFICE

Level: 1d6 + 3
Form: Device, injection, or pill
Effect: The user's body rapidly grows a strange orifice in their torso, large enough to fit a human fist but flexible enough to hold a compact disc or videocassette tape. One cypher held within the orifice doesn't count toward the user's cypher limit. As an action, the user can cause the orifice to appear or disappear (when the orifice isn't present, anything contained within it is inaccessible except through surgery). The orifice remains for one hour per cypher level, after which it expels its contents and disappears.

HUMANITY TESTER

Level: 1d6 + 4
Form: Device, injection, or pill
Effect: Reveals whether a targeted creature is human or some sort of inhuman impostor (such as an alien, demon, doppelganger, simulacrum, or vampire) if the cypher's level is greater than the creature's disguise level. If the cypher's level exceeds the impostor's level by 4 or more, it also marks the impostor for the next several hours so people can recognize it by this mark.

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INSANITY SUPPRESSOR

Level: 1d6

Form: Device, injection, or pill

Effect: Temporarily negates insanity or a mental disorder in a creature (two such effects if the cypher level is 6 or higher). Example disorders include delusions, manias, compulsions, phobias, psychopathy, and schizophrenia. The creature loses all negative symptoms of their insanity or mental disorder for one day. Each day after that, the creature must make a level 1 Intellect defense roll to prolong the effect; failure means relapse. The roll is hindered by one step for each day that has passed since the cypher was used.

INVISIBILITY REVEALER

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Device containing a liquid or silvery powder

Effect: Sprays its contents up to a long distance, revealing all invisible creatures within short range of the targeted point for one round per cypher level. Affected invisible creatures remain visible if they move outside the area, and those outside the area become visible if they enter the area.

INVISIBILITY SERUM

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Device, flask, or injection

Effect: The user's body becomes as transparent as air, making them effectively invisible for one minute per cypher level. However, their clothes and equipment are not affected, so the user must go naked if they want to be unseen. While invisible, the user is specialized in stealth and Speed defense tasks. They remain invisible even if they do something to reveal their presence or position (attacking, using an ability, moving a large object, and so on), but anyone trying to attack or physically interact with them on that turn gains an asset to do so.

Because the user is as transparent as air, when they are in water, mist, smoke, or anything other than reasonably clean air, they look like a person-shaped hole in whatever material they're in.

The serum has detrimental effects on the mind. Each minute it is in effect, the user takes 2 points of Intellect damage. Many users have become "stuck" in the invisible state and eventually go mad as a result.

Madness, page 284

MIND SWAPPER

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Amulet or device

Effect: The user attempts to swap minds with a creature within short range that is no larger than a human. The target can make an Intellect defense roll to resist. If the swap is successful, the user gains control of the creature's body (and vice versa). Physical abilities remain with the body, but mental abilities go with the mind; for example, an Adept with Onslaught (a mental ability) could take over the body of a Warrior with Swipe (a physical ability), and could use either of these while controlling the Warrior's body. All actions of both creatures are hindered while the swap is in effect, although long-term practice in a mind-swapped body eventually overcomes this penalty. The swap lasts for one hour per cypher level, after which the two minds return to their previous bodies.

Clever users of a mind swapper have an ally restrain or sedate them before swapping minds so their target doesn't cause trouble in the user's body.

Adept, page 24

Onslaught, page 167

Warrior, page 20

Swipe, page 188

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PRIMITIVE DOPPELGANGER

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Device, injection, or pill

Effect: The user's body begins growing a physical duplicate of the user, which harmlessly tears free after a few rounds and exists as an independent level 1 creature that looks exactly like the user. The doppelganger can communicate in a language known to the user and obeys the user's simple instructions, but otherwise appears to know very little of the world. After one hour per cypher level, the duplicate dies, melts, burns out, falls apart, or otherwise becomes nonfunctional.

Depending on the game setting, the doppelganger might be a robot, a clone, a temporal duplicate, or something else entirely. It may or may not have scars, tattoos, or other non-genetic features of the original.

REANIMATOR

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Amulet or injection

Effect: When used on a corpse of a creature no larger than a human, it reanimates as a violent zombie that is not under the user's control. This reanimation process takes a few minutes (a few rounds if the cypher is level 4 or higher, or one round if level 6 or higher).

Zombie, page 371

REVENANT SERUM

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Injection or potion

Effect: Brings a dead person back to life for a limited time as an obsessed creature called a revenant. The cypher can be used up to an hour before or after death (in anticipation of dying or in response to someone's death) and requires up to an hour to take effect, at which time the creature recovers 1d6 + 6 points to its Pools. The new revenant is usually obsessed with revenge on its killer or accomplishing one last task before truly dying again. A revenant has all the abilities it had when it was alive, but all its actions are hindered. It has the same appearance as before, except the wounds that killed it are still visible, and in general it has an unnatural look. It does not need to eat, drink, or sleep, but it can still rest if it wants to (such as to make a recovery roll). The revenant remains in this active state for one hour per cypher level, after which it dies again and cannot be reanimated with this cypher.

Because a human body can't dispose of colloidal silver, excessive intake of it causes a condition called argyria that turns skin purple or purple-grey.

SILGARHO INFUSION

Level: 1d6

Form: Flask or injection

Effect: Suffuses the user's body with a mixture of colloidal silver (sil), concentrated garlic (gar), and holy water (ho), making the user repellent to most vampires, which usually have an aversion to one or more of these materials. Vampire attacks with melee weapons against the user are hindered. Any PC vampire who attempts to feed on the user gains no sustenance and must make a Might defense roll or feel nauseous and have all their actions hindered for one minute. Any NPC vampire who attempts to feed on the user gains no sustenance and all their actions are hindered for one minute. The cypher's effect persists in the user's body for one day (two days if the cypher is level 4 or higher). If used directly against a vampire instead of being applied to a living creature, it affects the vampire as silver, garlic, and holy water normally would.

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Unphantomed Limb

Level: 1d6
Form: Device, injection, or pill
Effect: Gives a user who is missing a limb the ability to create a psychic construct in the form of a limb (two limbs if the cypher level is 5 or higher) that takes the place of and functions like their missing limb (or limbs). The unphantomed limb looks and acts like a typical healthy specimen of its kind, including having fingerprints. However, its motion is controlled by the user's will rather than by muscles and nerves, so any physical action the limb takes is an Intellect task instead of a Might or Speed task; for example, a melee attack with the unphantomed limb is an Intellect task, and to apply Effort, the user must spend points from their Intellect Pool. Damage to the limb affects the user as if the attack were on the user's body. The limb lasts for one day per cypher level.

Visage Scrutinizer

Level: 1d6 + 2
Form: Device, crystal, injection, or pill
Effect: Grants the user a heightened ability to see disguised people and creatures for what they really are. Tasks to see through conventional disguises (makeup, prosthetics, wigs, and so on) are eased by three steps. If the disguise is instead a comprehensive change like a full-body illusion, mental projection, or hologram, the user automatically sees through it if the disguise's level is lower than the cypher's level. The cypher lasts for one hour.

Wolfsbane Potion

Level: 1d6
Form: Flask or injection
Effect: Suffuses the user's body with a mixture of colloidal silver and wolfsbane, making the user repellent to werewolves (and similar werecreatures). Wolfsbane is poisonous, and using this cypher inflicts Speed damage and Intellect damage equal to the cypher's level. Werewolf attacks with melee weapons against the user are hindered. Any werewolf who attempts to feed on the user feels nauseous and all its actions are hindered for ten minutes. The cypher's effect persists in the user's body for one day (two days if the cypher is level 4 or higher). If used directly against a werewolf instead of being applied to a living creature, it hinders all the werewolf's actions and stops it from regenerating for several minutes.

Memorable Horror Moment: *The first time Nada puts on the sunglasses in* They Live *and sees a creature.*

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This chapter is safe for both players and GMs to read, although the GM may want to keep the descriptions and abilities of these artifacts a secret from the players.

Ghost vault, page 130

Most Cypher System artifacts in a horror setting are either cursed objects (which draw or focus the attention of monsters on a place or person) or things used to control, contain, or destroy the horrors threatening the main characters. The origin of the artifact is often part of the backstory of the plot: why a particular ghost is haunting the house, why the cultists are making human sacrifices, or why monsters keep appearing in a particular town. In most cases, the characters don't have to know how these things work, how they were made, or what sort of creature (alien, demon, ghost) is responsible—an artifact is merely a tool that gives the PCs a chance to survive the threat, or the thing that must be destroyed to make everything safe again (see the Bad Penny module).

The Bad Penny module is a handy GM tool when a horror artifact is important to the game's plot. Bad Penny, page 84.

Because one of the interesting aspects of horror is mixing genres, you should feel free to incorporate any of these artifacts into your horror game even if they're traditionally associated with different genres; it'll give your game a unique twist and give you many additional ways to scare the PCs and players. For example, PCs entering the lair of a vampire might find a room with a dozen brain cylinders, each containing the brain of a former lover or would-be hunter, forever imprisoned and available for conversation whenever the vampire wants it. Or PCs dealing with an alien invasion find the crashed spacecraft and discover that its engine is connected to a ghost vault, using the souls of the dead as a power source for interstellar travel.

Brain cylinder, page 129

LOVECRAFTIAN ARTIFACTS

The stories of the mythos often feature strange books or devices (which might be magical or of exotic scientific manufacture) that are connected to the plot and often reference or have links to each other. Even if your Lovecraftian game session doesn't involve these artifacts, having other characters mention them or letting the PCs find notes about them creates a sense of a larger world filled with unknowable horrors. Appropriate items in this chapter are:

- Brain cylinder
- *Necronomicon*
- Pnakotic Manuscripts
- Shining trapezohedron

Other fictional books in this genre include:

- *The Book of Eibon*
- *The King in Yellow*
- *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* (Nameless Cults)

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Example Horror Artifacts

The rest of this chapter has examples of artifacts suitable for a horror game.

Book of Thoth

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Bundle of Ancient Egyptian scrolls

Effect: This Egyptian funerary text is thought to have been authored by Thoth himself, the wisest of the Egyptian gods. It usually contains several spells, but its greatest power is a ritual that can revive a mummy (whether an inert mummy or an animate undead one) as a living immortal human being. The ritual requires an intact mummy, its canopic jars (or suitable replacements), and a human sacrifice whose level is equal to the target mummy's level. The ritual takes one hour to perform and costs Might, Speed, and Intellect points equal to the target mummy's level.

Depletion: —

Brain Cylinder

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Metal cylinder with three exterior ports

Effect: This device is designed to hold and preserve an intelligent brain, keeping it alive indefinitely. The brain must first be surgically extracted from its natural housing (typically a level 6 surgical task requiring an hour), then placed in the cylinder, saturated with a nutrient bath, and sealed shut. The brain is wired to three ports on the cylinder's exterior, which can be connected to external machines that allow it to see and hear, as well as speak through a voice synthesizer. The cylinder is immune to vacuum and cold, allowing it to be carried through space without harming its precious contents. The cylinder grants the brain 3 Armor, but the brain is otherwise helpless, unable to perform physical actions, and completely blind and deaf if disconnected from its machines. Deprived of the illusion of physical stimuli, a human brain trapped in a cylinder is likely to go insane after weeks or months.

Depletion: 1 in 1d6 (check each year)

Some brain cylinders were created by the mi-go; others are the products of mad scientists or other alien species that want to study humans.

Mi-go, page 342

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CURSED VIDEO

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: DVD, film, thumb drive, or videocassette

For some cursed videos, a victim can free themselves of the curse by making another person watch the video, thus passing the curse on to a new victim.

Effect: Anyone who watches this disturbing video must make an Intellect defense roll against the level of the artifact or become cursed. A cursed victim becomes haunted by a malevolent spirit and begins to experience strange phenomena, which eventually kills them. The curse can simultaneously affect a number of people equal to the artifact level (which prevents it from starting a curse epidemic by being broadcast or posted online where thousands of people can see it at once).

Ghosts, page 58

Depletion: —

DEMON PUZZLE

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Crystal or device

Effect: Solving the puzzle creates a beacon or portal that draws a demon (or other extradimensional entity) to the user's location. The demon's level is equal to the artifact's level. Depending on the intent of the puzzle's creator and the nature of the demon summoned, the demon might perform a service for the user, attack the user, try to drag the user back to its home dimension, or leave to do whatever it wants. (Solving the puzzle is part of the action of activating the artifact and doesn't require a roll, as it *wants* to be solved this way.)

There are similar artifacts that instead summon or banish ghosts, Lovecraftian horrors, or other strange creatures, with similar risks.

Instead of using the artifact to summon a demon, the user can attempt to solve the puzzle in a different way, which forces a demon back to its native dimension. The user must make an Intellect roll with a difficulty equal to the artifact's level. If successful, the user banishes a demon within short range whose level is lower than the artifact's level.

Depletion: 1 in 1d100

Memorable Horror Moment: *The scene in* The Ring *when Samara crawls out of the television.*

GHOST VAULT

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Large immobile machine

Effect: When used in conjunction with a ghost trap, this machine can imprison multiple ghosts (including spirits, phased beings, and similar creatures) for an indefinite amount of time. The total level of ghosts it can store is equal to its level × 20 (so a level 5 vault can hold 100 levels of ghosts). The vault can be used as a ghost trap, but doing so triggers a depletion roll. If the vault is disconnected from its power supply, destroyed, or depletes, the imprisoned ghosts are freed, initially at a rate of one per round but quickly speeding up so that all of them are free within a couple of minutes.

Ghost trap, page 123

Depletion: 1 in 1d20 (check each month)

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Human Suit

Level: 1d6

Form: Folds of cloth and fleshlike substance (inactive) or a specific human individual (active)

Effect: The wearer of a human suit is completely disguised as a specific human individual; their disguise task to pretend to be that human is eased by five steps. A human suit is usually no one in particular; each suit is designed to allow the wearer to adopt a new human persona, not pretend to be someone famous. A suit's technology is such that it adapts to fit a wearer ranging from half the size of a normal human to one that is almost the same size (including another human). Human suits usually come with attached clothing.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

Monkey's Paw

Level: 1d6

Form: Mummified monkey's paw

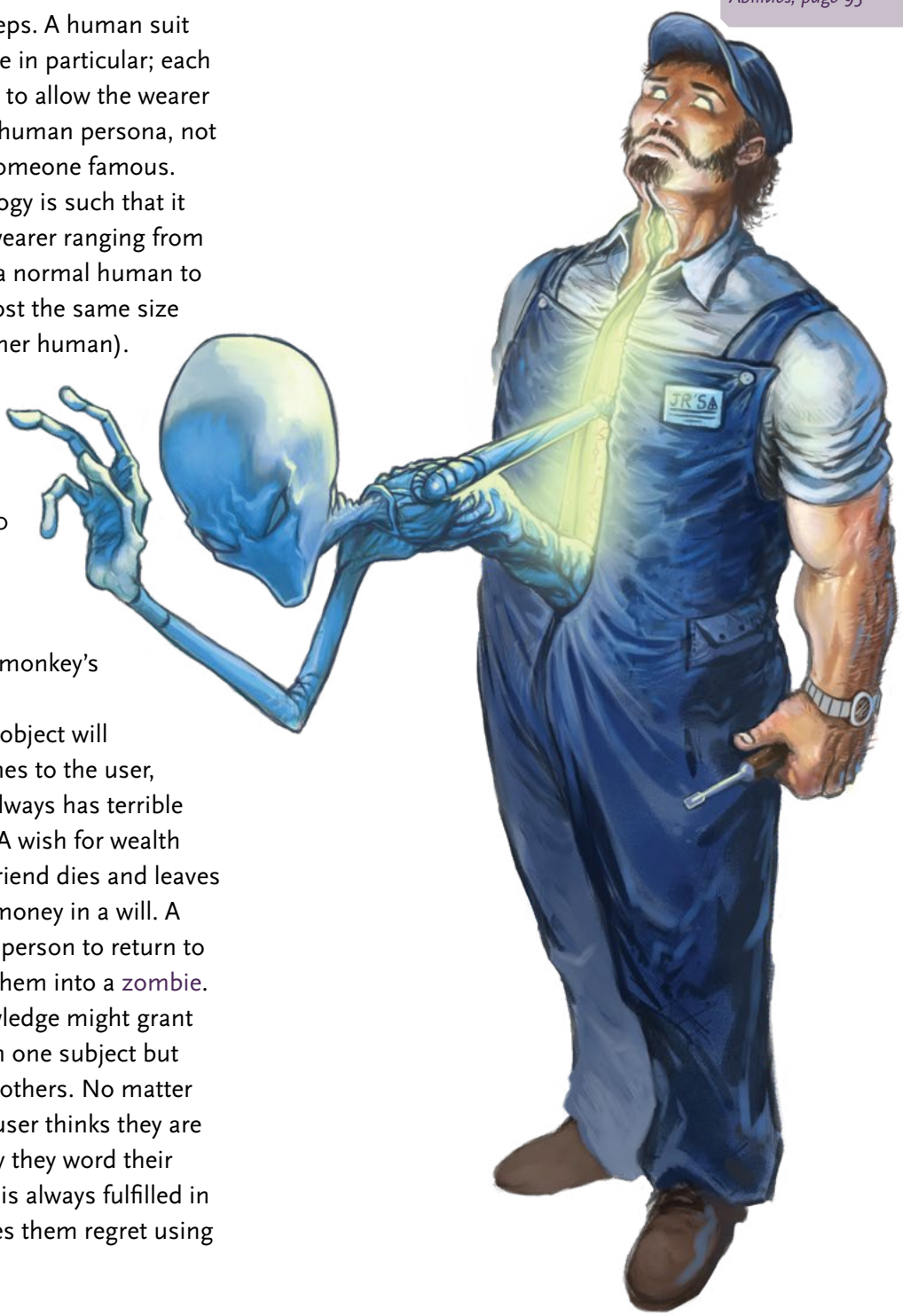
Effect: This cursed object will grant three wishes to the user, but each wish always has terrible consequences. A wish for wealth might mean a friend dies and leaves the user some money in a will. A wish for a dead person to return to life might turn them into a zombie. A wish for knowledge might grant specialization in one subject but inabilities in all others. No matter how clever the user thinks they are or how precisely they word their wish, the result is always fulfilled in a way that makes them regret using the artifact. The monkey's paw is limited to affecting things of its level or lower. For example, a level 3 monkey's paw could be used to wish for the death of a level 3 enemy, destroy a level 3 barrier, resurrect a dead level 3 person, and so on.

Depletion: 1 in 1d6

The GM might find it convenient to choose an appropriate character ability (based on the artifact's level) to represent how the monkey's paw accomplishes the wish.

Zombie, page 371

Abilities, page 95



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Necronomicon (Lovecraftian, Latin Edition)

There may be damaged copies of the Necronomicon *in Greek and a handwritten version that was poorly translated into English and exists only in fragments. Supposedly the original Arabic version was lost or destroyed in a fire.*

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Grimoire (no reader can long keep the book's exact form in memory)

Effect: A reader who understands Latin can use this grimoire to accomplish a wide variety of occult operations, all of which risk their sanity. Indeed, one must be a little insane or at least naive to use this tome, given its storied history. That said, the uses a reader can put the *Necronomicon* to include the following.

- *Reference*. The grimoire eases by three steps any task related to knowledge of Lovecraftian realms, entities, objects, and related subjects.
- *Spellbook*. The grimoire contains a variety of horrifying spells and rituals, which a reader can attempt to cast by incanting from the tome. They range from simple curses and spells to speak to the dead all the way up to death spells and the summoning of Lovecraftian entities. The GM can let the player describe the kind of spell desired, and then decide if it exists in the *Necronomicon*. If it does, the spell also likely has an unintended side effect, such as infecting a nearby object or friend with a demonic entity, killing a pet, or driving a nearby NPC insane.

Each time the reader references the grimoire or casts a spell from it, the disturbing imagery, phrasing, and general evil nature require them to make a difficulty 5 Intellect defense roll. On a failed roll, they take 5 points of Intellect damage, descend one step on the damage track, and take one other action (determined by the GM) motivated by insanity. On a successful roll, they still take 2 points of Intellect damage.

Depletion: —

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Pnakotic Manuscripts

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Tome with stony plates binding a sheaf of parchment

Effect: When a user reads aloud from the manuscripts, they can create either of the following effects, both of which put them at risk:

- *Contact the mind of a powerful godlike being.* The user must make a difficulty 5 Intellect defense roll. On a failed roll, they take 5 points of Intellect damage, descend one step on the damage track, and take one other action (determined by the GM) motivated by insane panic. On a successful roll, they take 2 points of Intellect damage and learn the answer to one question, no matter the scope, from the mind contacted.
- *Close a portal to a Lovecraftian planet or dimension.* This requires reciting a chant from the book and might require an object that somehow relates to the portal (such as a piece of a creature from the destination). The user must make a difficulty 5 Intellect defense roll each round they chant from the manuscript. On a failed roll, they take 4 points of Intellect damage. On a successful roll, they take 2 points of Intellect damage and make progress toward closing the portal. A typical portal requires ten successes to close it. Another person can take over the chant if the previous person stops, but the first Intellect defense roll for their chanting is hindered.

Depletion: —

Shining Trapezohedron

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Black spherical stone with red streaks and many irregular facets

Effect: Summons a messenger of the Outer Gods (powerful and dangerous Lovecraftian entities): a bat-like, three-eyed creature called the Haunter of the Dark. The messenger can show its summoner wonders of the universe or teach them spells, but it requires human sacrifices, and if allowed to roam, it will hunt and commit murder. The stone is usually stored in a strangely angled hinged box made of yellow metal, decorated with carvings of weird alien beings.

Haunter of the Dark: *level 6, magical knowledge and stealth as level 8; inflicts 6 points of Intellect damage; automatically banished in any light stronger than dim light*

Depletion: —

Silgarho Bullet

Level: 1d6

Form: Hollow-point bullet

Effect: Silgarho (sil-*gar*-o) bullets are custom-made hollow bullets filled with a mixture of powdered silver (sil), garlic (gar), and holy water (ho), and sealed at the top with wax. They are designed to have an extra effect against vampires who have aversions to one or more of these substances. The bullet breaks open when it hits, scattering these materials into the wound. A silgarho bullet inflicts +1 point of damage and hinders the target's actions for one round (this extra damage and hindered step is for each substance in the bullet that the vampire is averse to). Alternatively, the bullet can be fired against a hard surface such as a wall or floor, creating a cloud of dispersed material an immediate distance across, which lasts for one or two rounds and affects (for one round) any averse vampire who passes through it. Silgarho bullets are safe for vampires to handle—it's only when broken open that they cause reactions.

Vampire Aversions, page 164

One advantage of a silgarho bullet over a destructive cypher is that the bullet doesn't count toward your cypher limit.

Depletion: Automatic

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SPIRIT BOARD

Level: 1d6

Form: Weathered, flat piece of wood inked with letters and numbers

Effect: Unlike the mass-produced parlor game, this handcrafted wooden board has the power to contact the spirit world. One or more people put their fingers on a wooden planchette and allow a supernatural force to move it around the board, spelling out words to answer questions from the participants. Each minute that the artifact is used, the users can ask one question from the spirits and get a general answer if one of them makes an Intellect roll (this might be modified by any skills or abilities the user has relating to ghosts or the supernatural); other participants can help with this task. The GM assigns a level to the question, so the more obscure the answer, the more difficult the task. Generally, knowledge that could be found by looking somewhere other than the current location is level 1, and obscure knowledge of the past is level 7; gaining knowledge of the future is normally impossible.

Helping, page 226

Usually the spirits contacted by the board are benign or indifferent and will answer honestly. Sometimes the users contact a mischievous spirit who gives answers that are lies or half-truths for the sake of its own amusement, or perhaps to give the users a scare. However, there is always a chance that a hostile spirit (such as a demon or vengeful ghost whose level is equal to the artifact level) takes over the interaction. This may occur if there is a GM intrusion while using the board, if the question asked is too difficult for the contacted spirits to answer, or if the users fail to end the session by using the planchette to indicate "goodbye." A hostile spirit's answers are a mix of lies, contentious ambiguities, frightening predictions, and threats; it may choose to remain in the area for a while and haunt the participants.

Depletion: 1 in 1d100 (check each session)

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Chapter 13: AWAKENING 137
Chapter 14: SECRETS OF BEING A VAMPIRE 159
Chapter 15: YOUR CITY AT NIGHT 173
Chapter 16: YOUR LAST SUNRISE 187
Chapter 17: POWER VACUUM 195
Chapter 18: GANG WAR 204
Chapter 19: THE HUNTED 215

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If you're a player, stop right here and check with the GM before reading any further, just in case they want to keep some of this secret for now. If you're a GM, read chapters 13 and 14 next, in that order.

This part of the book is about Masters of the Night, a mini-campaign setting where the PCs are newly created vampires in the modern world. Without the guidance or presence of more experienced vampires, the PCs have to find their place in the city and adjust to the risks and needs of being undead.

Chapter 13: Awakening has spoiler-free information for the players, written as if the characters know they are now vampires.

Chapter 14: Secrets of Being a Vampire is GM-only rules information about vampire PCs and advice about running the game.

Chapter 15: Your City at Night has the setting info for the campaign and a "who's who" of other new vampires (who have formed alliances and small gangs for survival and to control territory in the city).

Chapter 16: Your Last Sunrise is the starting adventure for the setting, in which the PCs awaken in a locked room after already having been bitten by a vampire.

Chapter 17: Power Vacuum is an adventure that gets the PCs to a safe house and reveals that all of the older vampires have gone missing, but other newly created vampires like the PCs are vying for dominance.

Chapter 18: Gang War is an adventure in which the PCs' business comes under attack from a rival vampire gang, sparking escalating reprisals.

Chapter 19: The Hunted is an adventure in which a rival gang approaches the PCs with an unexpected peace offering, and unknown powerful forces begin to wipe out the feuding vampire gangs, forcing the PCs to decide whether to fight or flee.

Memorable Horror Moment: *The shadow of Count Orlok as he creeps up the stairs in* Nosferatu.

FRANKIE
Intelligent vampire Adept who Doesn't Do Much

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Congratulations—you're a vampire. Welcome to your second life. Things are about to get weird, forever.

Some people can't handle the change, can't handle becoming a murderer who feeds on human blood. The change breaks people, brings out hidden aspects of their character that they never knew existed. It's a shock to understand that you don't have to die of sickness or old age, that the supernatural exists, that your religious leaders lied to you, or that your atheism may not protect you from damnation.

But not you. You're not one of those people. You've had enough bad experiences that you know how to roll with the punches. You know that the world is many shades of grey instead of black and white. Sometimes you gotta steal if you're hungry, and sometimes it's kill or be killed. You're either the hunter or the prey. You've chosen to accept your role as the hunter, even if that means abandoning some of your mortal mores and ethics. You might cling to some aspect of your former goodness as a salve to the evil you have to do. That's fine—we all rationalize our choices, especially the ones we're uncomfortable with. But the fact is, you need to kill in order to live.

Maybe you'll ease your conscience by feeding only on murderers and child molesters. But those kinds of people are scarce. So maybe you'll feed on gangbangers, too. And skinheads. And maybe some old people who were going to die soon anyway. And surely nobody would miss a homeless person now and then, especially the ones that piss on the sidewalk, use heroin near elementary schools, and scream at people inside coffee shops. Little compromises you make with yourself. Because you get hungry.

Or . . . you could just accept that you're not one of the good guys. Even if you were before, you aren't now. At best, you're an antihero. At worst, you're a sympathetic villain. There are billions of people in this world, most of them suffering, and you may as well take advantage of the opportunity you've been given.

Your job isn't to make the world a better place. Your job is just to stay alive.

This chapter is safe for players to read once the GM has let them know their characters are vampires.

CREATING YOUR VAMPIRE CHARACTER

Follow these steps.

1. Create your character as a human (type, descriptor, focus).
2. Choose your blood shifts.
3. Add your standard vampire abilities.
5. Add your vampire aversions. (Your GM may reveal these to you later.)
6. Optional: choose a bloodline ability.

Blood shifts, page 148

Standard vampire abilities, page 148

Vampire aversions, page 164

Bloodline ability, page 149

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Flavor, page 34

Vampires of Each Character Type

Masters of the Night uses the standard four character types in the *Cypher System Rulebook*: Adept, Explorer, Speaker, and Warrior. Here are some setting-appropriate character concepts for each type.

Adept: Addict, conspiracy theorist, fringe scientist, preacher (note that the Adept type often assumes a magical setting, so using a nonmagical modern flavor may be necessary to make an Adept character concept work)

Explorer: Drifter, private detective, investigative reporter, scholar, scientist

Speaker: Con artist, dirty lawyer, entertainer, personal assistant

Warrior: Athlete, bodyguard, corrupt cop, mercenary, security guard, soldier, thug

Appropriate Descriptors

The following descriptors are appropriate for this setting. Other descriptors from the *Cypher System Rulebook* may be appropriate but would require consulting with the GM to determine how such a character might get involved in the campaign.

Brash	Fast	Perceptive
Calm	Graceful	Resilient
Chaotic	Guarded	Rugged
Charming	Hardy	Sharp-Eyed
Clever	Hideous	Skeptical
Clumsy	Inquisitive	Stealthy
Craven	Intelligent	Strong
Cruel	Intuitive	Strong-Willed
Dishonorable	Learned	Swift
Doomed	Lucky	Tongue-Tied
Empathic	Mechanical	Tough
Exiled	Mysterious	Vicious

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APPROPRIATE FOCI

The foci described below are appropriate for this setting. If you chose a focus that isn't included here and the GM thinks it isn't compatible with the campaign or being a vampire, you can change your focus to one of these (work with your GM to figure out which abilities, if any, you keep from your original focus and which ones you replace with abilities from the new focus).

Each entry includes a description of the focus and a suggestion for how to play a character with that focus in this setting.

Defends the Weak: Someone has to stand up for the helpless, the weak, and the unprotected. You believe this duty, this obligation, falls to you, and thus you have spent much of your life watching out for the people around you. When you saw them in trouble, you were the first to come to their aid. You might have given up your last dime to help the hungry, taken a beating to save a person from the same, or rallied your friends to take on injustice wherever you found it. Now that you're a vampire, this is a difficult pursuit, as most humans are weaker than you and you are a threat to them; in many ways, keeping yourself away from vulnerable people is the best way to protect them. Maybe you've chosen a specific group of people to protect—children, the homeless, a neighborhood, or one specific family—and you focus your efforts on keeping them safe.

Descends From Nobility: You descend from privilege, wealth, and power (maybe from a family business, a political legacy, or a royal or noble title). Your family once owned land (perhaps they still do), wielded political control, and accumulated vast wealth. You've stepped away from that somewhat, though you still carry a noble title, whether you want it or not. People sometimes recognize your name, and sometimes they recognize you as being descended from nobility. Because of your odd schedule and association with disreputable people, your relatives probably consider you a black sheep—someone the rest of the family ignores most of the time and disavows when asked. Your name, title, and history still have clout in the night. Perhaps your family is known for shady deals and corruption, and you aren't as isolated from them as you might think.

Doesn't Do Much: You're a slacker. You've had a number of jobs in your life, but nothing's really stuck. No single thing consumes you, compels you, or drives you. You float from event to event. That doesn't necessarily mean you're unhappy. It's not a bad life. You like to take it easy. Appreciate the little things. Partake in a few relaxing substances now and again. Enjoy the rug that ties the whole room together. Not a lot of stress, and you know a little about a lot of different things. Becoming a vampire has thrown a wrench into that, as your urge to feed is stronger than anything you've ever felt. Perhaps it will motivate you to do more with your life, or perhaps you'll let other things slide even more so you can focus on that one desire. You have a lot of time to figure it out.

Drives Like a Maniac: Your skill behind the wheel is legendary. When the engine is racing and the wind is in your hair, you feel like speed itself. Where you

Memorable Horror Moment: *When the vampires openly attack the town in* 30 Days of Night.

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go, others fear to follow, for the wastes are cruel to those whose vehicles break down. Even before you were a vampire, you didn't think about the risks—you lived to drive, and your fondest wish was to die behind the wheel. Now you think you'll live forever, and you can walk away from just about any crash. You have forever to perfect your skills, and better eyes and reflexes than you ever did as a human.

DALLAS
Stealthy vampire Explorer who Hunts

Entertains: You are an entertainer: a singer, dancer, poet, storyteller, or something similar. Naturally charismatic and talented, you have also studied to master your art. You know all the old poems, songs, jokes, and stories, and you're skilled at creating new ones, too. Now you're a vampire, ageless and mysterious, with lifetimes to reinvent yourself and master every form of entertainment. You'll be a quadruple threat, a quintuple threat, or more. And anyone who gives you a bad review will find out just how threatening you can be.

Explores Dark Places: You explore foreboding ruins, mysterious locales of ancient times, dungeons deep, dark caverns, and similar places, trained in such activities by those who have gone before you. You spend so much of your time in the dark that you slowly adapt to it, almost becoming a creature of the gloom yourself. Even in civilized areas, you prefer to keep to the shadows. And all of that was *before* you were bitten. You no longer have to worry about predators, traps, or suspicious locals. You can reach places no human could survive and come back with proof of your exploits.

Fights Dirty: You know one thing for certain: the only important element of a fight is who wins. How? Why? These questions are inconsequential. Thus, you'll do anything to win a fight. Some might say you have no honor, no class, or some other foolish statement, but they're missing the point. You come out on top in a battle, and that's all that matters. You scratch, kick, and trip. You tangle foes in draperies, push them down stairs, and throw dirt in their

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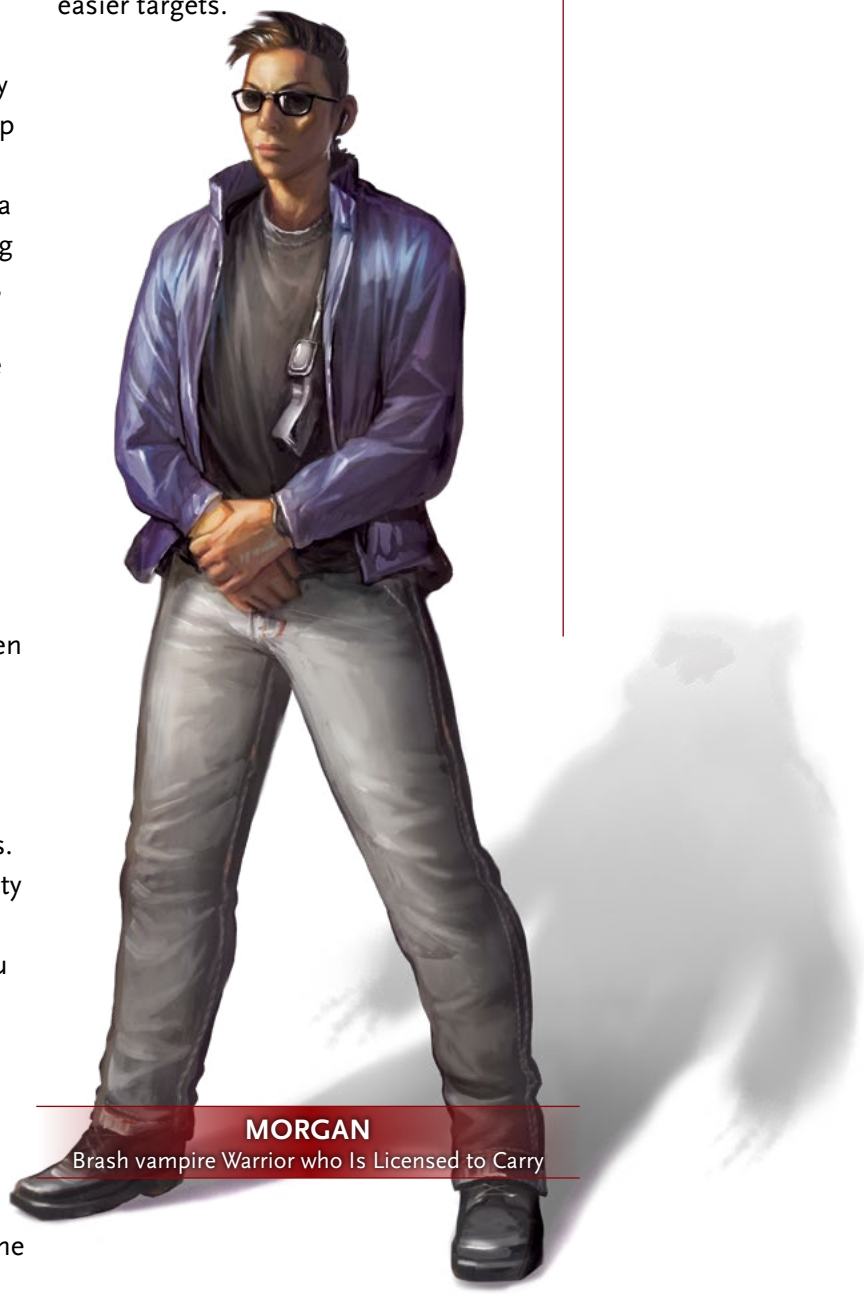
eyes. You trick them into looking the wrong way, call them names, and say terrible things about their mothers. As a vampire, you're stronger and faster than any humans, and just to keep things challenging, you sometimes like to play with your food a bit, letting them think they have a chance before you move like a blur, throw them across the room, or show them how sharp your teeth are. If you get shot or stabbed, just play dead, then get up and kill them anyway.

Fights With Panache: You know that style is at least as important as substance. Defeating foes is secondary to looking good while doing it. You leap through the air, make a flourish with your weapon, and attack, usually with a clever, biting show of wit. Just watching you fight is entertaining. As a vampire, you use your abilities to enhance your fighting style, performing unbelievable stunts, pulling off one-in-a-million shots, and making your opponents feel like they're in slow motion. Your enemies used to hate you for your bravado. Now they'll fear you for your inhuman grace and accuracy—and you'll treasure the look of surprise when you bare your teeth to finish them off with a bite.

Hunts: You are a tracker. Perhaps you hunt animals or more deadly creatures. Perhaps you go after people as a bounty hunter, law enforcer, or killer for hire. Whatever form your hunting takes, you are trained in stalking your quarry and bringing it down. You are a dangerous individual. And now you're a vampire. You can outrun a deer or wrestle a bear. No human prey can match you. Now they're your food. With your superhuman skills and abilities, only the most dangerous prey has any chance to evade your pursuit.

Infiltrates: You have trained to be the perfect infiltrator. You use a wide variety of disguises and tools to perform your duties, but your greatest tools are your own skills. Being a vampire makes you better than any human, and that's not even counting the strange supernatural abilities you can draw upon. Secret societies, government offices, and military bases have become much easier targets.



MORGAN
Brash vampire Warrior who Is Licensed to Carry

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Interprets the Law: You know the law as well as the back of your hand. Broad mandates, narrow rulings, well-meaning overreaches, regulatory considerations, and outright loopholes in the law are all the tools you need to twist outcomes to suit your desire. Knowledge is power, which is why many people who have crossed you now fear you. As a vampire, you'll use those same skills to convince witnesses who have seen too much, put pressure on politicians who oppose your illegal activities, and make connections with useful people who aren't afraid to break the law.

Memorable Horror Moment: *The brutal vampire attack in the bridge tunnel, from* Let Me In.

Is Idolized by Millions: Some celebrities are known for their talent, while others are simply known for being known. However the spotlight found you, you're a celebrity now, and people love you—often a little too much. You can't go anywhere publicly without people recognizing you, approaching you for a shared selfie, or pointing at you from afar. Whenever you do anything, whether it's going to the beach, adopting a new pet, or going out clubbing, the event becomes pablum for celebrity TV shows and websites, which often twist the facts into a caricature of reality. You have to be careful what and when you eat, but fortunately for you, people are used to celebrities being eccentric—sleeping all day, staying up all night, embracing fad diets, associating with strange people, and wearing sunglasses even when it's dark out. It's amazing that you could live under such scrutiny and not be outed as a vampire—the tabloids are filled with even more ridiculous stories than that.

Is Licensed to Carry: You're a proficient adversary when armed. Hundreds of hours of training mean that you don't crack when under fire; you take care of business before the bad guys even know you're there. You might be a cop, soldier, crook, or hunter, or just a citizen interested in personal or home protection. As a vampire, packing heat means you don't have to rely on your teeth to deal with annoyances. Plus, having a gun is nice when your food tries to run away, and a messy shotgun wound can cover up the evidence of a bite.

Is Wanted by the Law: You've done something—or people mistakenly think that you've done something—that has made you a target of the law. Sheriffs, rangers, and bounty hunters are looking for you, which means you need to keep a low profile. Whether or not you did rob an establishment back east or actually would kill a man just for looking at you is up to you. Maybe it's all true, or maybe it's all a mistake that snowballed out of control. You might be looking to set the record straight, or hoping for redemption. Becoming a vampire could be your excuse to live safely in the shadows or an opportunity to present yourself as a target for those who want to bring you down.

Learns Quickly: You might not have your dream job, but you do all right. Perhaps events beyond your control set you down a path that led to where you are today, making the best of a mediocre or even a bad situation. Or maybe you're young, and your break just hasn't come along yet. Either way, you work hard to get ahead, deal with bad situations as they arise, and learn

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quickly whether you're working retail, in a warehouse, or out on the street after a horrific event left you homeless. Being a vampire is just one more thing you'll deal with—except in this case you've been handed an opportunity instead of a problem. Maybe things are starting to go your way.

Lives in the Wilderness: You dwell in the wilds. You probably have done so most, if not all, of your life, coming to understand the mysteries of nature, weather, and survival. The ways of flora and fauna are your ways. You know enough about predators to figure out the best way to survive as a vampire in the wild. There are plenty of animals to feed on, not to mention the occasional hiker or vagrant who can disappear without too much trouble. And when you have to spend time in the city, you get by, just like the wild animals that creep into human turf at night and head back to their lairs before daylight.

Looks for Trouble: You've always loved a good fight. You like nothing more than to take off the kid gloves and confront your opposition in the most direct way possible. You don't hide, and you don't shirk. You take things head on in a physical way. Most likely, your friends feel better about going into danger with you at their side or their back. As a vampire, you're even more dangerous than before—enough that you might downplay your appearance a bit. You wouldn't want to miss out on a fight because someone decided you were too scary to mess with.

Masters Weaponry: You have worked long and hard with one particular type of weapon: a knife, whip, pistol, or whatever you choose. You might belong to an organization that practices with this weapon, or it could be something you've always had a knack for. Your vampire abilities mean you can take your training beyond human limits. Develop unique stunts that require superhuman strength or speed. Rediscover ancient secrets lost to time or only hinted at in lore. Become an undying legend.

Moves Like a Cat: You are extremely dexterous. Your speed and agility make you almost a thing of wonder. Your training—coupled with your vampire abilities—allows you to move quickly and smoothly, land safely when you fall, and avoid danger. Cats may have nine lives, but you're probably immortal.

Murders: The murderous assassin is a master of dealing death. No one is better at sneaking into a location, eliminating a target, and slipping out again. Maybe this was originally just a job for you, but now you have to kill every few days so you can feed, making these skills even more important. Obviously, a professional killer is not likely to have a lot of friends—unless those friends also have to feed on human blood.

Needs No Weapon: You don't use weapons—you are a weapon. With powerful punches, kicks, and full-body moves, you inflict incredible damage on your foes (and don't forget your bite, of course). No matter how you originally gained these skills, becoming a vampire has made them even greater. You are as dangerous as a tiger or grizzly bear, but you can walk down the street just like any human.

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Never Says Die: You are as stalwart, hardy, and driven as can be imagined. When others are ready to quit, you're just getting started. Vampires are tougher than humans, and you mean to be the toughest vampire of all. Whether your foe is a rival undead or a hunter who somehow figured out your secret, you'll outlast them in any fight and outlive any attack.

Operates Undercover: Espionage is not something you know anything about. At least, that's what you want everyone to believe, because in truth, you've been trained as a spy or covert agent. You might work for a government or for yourself. You might be a police detective or a criminal. You could even be an investigative reporter. Regardless, you learn information that others attempt to keep secret. You collect rumors and whispers, stories and hard-won evidence, and you use that knowledge to aid your own endeavors, inform your employers, or sell to the highest bidder. As a vampire, one of your identities is your normal human self—a mask you wear so that nobody from your old life knows you're one of the undead. Sometimes letting that mask slip gives you the advantage you need to pry information out of someone or expose a weakness you can exploit.

Performs Feats of Strength: A lifetime of physical training rewards you with incredible power. Your muscles ripple beneath your skin, evident in your extraordinary build and frame, and you can do things others would not dream possible. Even other vampires—whose bodies don't necessarily reflect the physical power they can exert—respect your physique and what it implies you can do.

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Plays Too Many Games: A lifetime spent playing games has gifted you with a strong desire to win, and keen reflexes built from long hours of practice. When you open the rulebook, pick up the cards, or grab the game controller, your mastery is evident in your confident manner. You know things most people will never learn, or even dream that it's possible to learn by playing games. In fact, many dismiss you as someone who doesn't know the real world, having devoted yourself to meaningless pursuits. Being a vampire means you have even more time to practice and perfect your skills, and to try new ways to use what you've learned in pursuit of prey, whether that's a speed run or doing it in hard mode.

Runs Away: You don't always run away, but it's your first instinct. It's saved you more than a few times. Being cautious is the best policy, and you've developed it into something of an art form. If someone is going to put up their defenses, that person is you. Once a new danger is adequately assessed (from a safe perspective), you'll probably deal with it. Now that you're a vampire, there's a whole new world of threats out there, and probably some dangerous things you never even knew existed. If anything, you have more to lose now—if you're killed, you lose centuries instead of decades of life. You're no coward; you just want to be the one to decide when to engage an enemy—and to do it on your terms.

Solves Mysteries: With a keen eye for detail and a quick wit, you can use a selection of clues to figure out what really happened when others are left scratching their heads. While someone who solves mysteries might be thought of as a detective or an investigator, you could be a professor or a scientist. All the secrets of the vampire world await your scrutiny, and maybe you'll be the one to solve problems that have vexed the living dead for centuries.

Throws With Deadly Accuracy: Sometimes you wonder if your hand and your mind's eye are connected in an intricate perfection of timing and aim. Your expertise might be in carefully crafted throwing daggers and shuriken, or perhaps you use whatever's nearby. Your thrown weapons allow you to strike at a distance but (unlike with a gun) still have a personal connection with the target. As a vampire, do you use blunt objects so your prey still has all their blood when you catch them, or do you use sharp ones so they leave a trail of blood you can follow? Do you prefer death by a thousand cuts, or use a big weapon like a fire axe to disguise your feeding as a common brutal murder?

Wields Two Weapons at Once: You fight with two weapons in melee, sometimes called dual wielding. A fearsome warrior, quick and strong, you believe that the best defense is a strong offense. You might prefer knives, beat your foes with nightsticks, or go for something exotic and thematic like metal claws or a bladed gauntlet (or your own claws, if you have the right bloodline ability). A weapon in each hand feels right, something feral and primordial that your vampire instincts enjoy.

Works for a Living: No one ever expected great things from you. Whether because you had no choice in the matter, or because you saw what

Memorable Horror Moment: *The opening scene in* The Hunger *where we see Miriam and John feeding for the first time, set to Bauhaus's song "Bela Lugosi's Dead."*

Bloodline ability, page 149

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needed doing, you started working early in life, learning as you went. You work for a living at some job requiring physical labor. You're good at it, and you take great satisfaction in it, and in a job well done. Your vampire abilities may help you work faster or more efficiently, but that's not an excuse to cut corners. You're dependable, and although being a dependable vampire sounds boring, you know how important it is that the work gets done.

Works the Back Alleys: The thief, the burglar, the pickpocket: these are the dangerous individuals who haunt the back alleys of every community. You are a thief in a city or town, making your livelihood at the expense of the wealthy. Your talents, however, prepare you for all kinds of pursuits, even when you're not crouching in an alley or climbing into a window. That these skills make you an even better vampire (and vice versa) is another bonus of your undead transformation. It's time to take your plans to the next level and pull off some heists that used to be too difficult or too dangerous.

Works the System: You've knocked around a lot and run afoul of the law a few times, but you've evaded authorities on a variety of fronts more often than

THE OTHER PCs ARE YOUR ALLIES

In a campaign where the PCs are shady or outright villainous, it's easy to be tempted to turn on each other in a backstabbing mess.

Resist that temptation.

A roleplaying game is a cooperative experience. The idea is that the PCs are working together toward a common goal. We have plenty of examples of movies, TV shows, books, and comics where bad guys cooperate with each other to steal something valuable, overthrow a common foe, and otherwise take care of situations they can't fix alone. Yes, there are examples of villains betraying each other, but it doesn't have to play out that way.

This campaign is set up so you're immediately put in a situation where you need to work together, and external threats (whether to your lives or your business ventures) will encourage you to help each other out. The other PCs are literally the only other people you know who have any idea what you're going through. Your characters already have connections to each other, and you have the opportunity to explore how those connections can grow and change now that you've become vampires. Even if you're inclined to betray the other PCs or just don't get along with them very well, you have plenty of reasons not to betray them. Remember that *the sun itself* is literally trying to kill your character—you don't need to add the other PCs to the list of things that want your character dead.

If your character isn't fitting in with the group, make a new character. If you as a player are bored, take a break from the game. If your character is frustrated with the group dynamic, go have a bite to eat. Having your character turn against the other PCs will make the other players resent you, and that's how people get permanently kicked out of a gaming group.

Don't be that player.

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not. That's because you are adept at noticing flaws and exploits in systems, whether those systems are civil laws, investment regulations, computer codes, games of all sorts, or similar artificial constructions. Once you notice and fully comprehend a system, you can manipulate it to your own ends. You're used to working all hours of the night on a problem, with a hot mug of something delicious keeping you company, so being a vampire is a natural fit for you. You'll find a way to break—and innovate—being undead just like you've done for everything else.

Would Rather Be Reading: Your whole life, people have been asking you why you read so much. Would you rather read about life than live it, they ask? Yes, you answer, probably inwardly. You love fiction that gives you escape and nonfiction that enriches your mind. You're always learning new things. Now you have all the time in the world to read about everything. Maybe you want to get your hands on real vampire literature, or maybe you'll reread a lot of human-authored stuff and look for undead subtext.

VAMPIRE AS PART OF YOUR CHARACTER SENTENCE

Becoming a vampire adds a defining element to your character sentence—another adjective that goes next to your descriptor. For example, you might be a Clever vampire Explorer who Works the Back Alleys, or a Rugged vampire Warrior who Murders.

Just as your type and focus give you choices about what abilities you can learn and develop, being a vampire gives you additional choices and strange abilities that you can develop over time. It's fine to choose vampire abilities that enhance what you can do with your type or focus, or you could develop your vampire abilities to shore up limitations or weaknesses in other aspects of your character. For example, if Heather is playing a physically oriented Warrior who is good at combat, she might enhance her speed and strength to augment her fighting ability, or develop the power to mesmerize people in case she ends up in a situation that brute force can't fix.

One of the most obvious benefits of being a vampire is having blood shifts, which are power shifts fueled by your supernatural undead nature.

The Masters of the Night setting assumes that all new vampire PCs begin as tier 1 characters. Chapter 14 has advice for GMs who want to have higher-tier PCs gain vampire powers.

Power shifts, page 292

RILEY
Charming vampire Speaker who Moves Like a Cat

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BLOOD SHIFTS

You might want to write your blood shifts on your main character sheet, perhaps in the Skills or Special Abilities section, so you don't forget them. There's also a space for them on the Vampire Abilities Reference Sheet, page 223.

Vampires can do things that regular people cannot. You are more powerful than normal living human PCs. This is partly reflected in your blood shifts. As a first-tier vampire PC, you have three blood shifts. You gain one additional blood shift at tiers 2, 4, and 6. This means that at tier 6, you have six blood shifts.

Blood shifts that affect your rolls are like permanent levels of Effort that are always active. They don't count toward your maximum Effort use (nor do they count as skills or assets). They simply ease tasks that fall into specific categories, which include (but are not necessarily limited to) the following.

Accuracy: All attack rolls

Dexterity: Movement, acrobatics, initiative, and Speed defense

Surprise Attack, page 188

Thrust, page 191

Healing: One extra (one-action) recovery roll per day

Intelligence: Intellect defense rolls and all knowledge, science, and crafting tasks

Resilience: Might defense rolls and Armor (+1)

Savant: Two specific skills (other than attacks, defenses, or a special ability), such as history, perception, or persuasion

The GM may allow you to change your blood shifts under certain circumstances, such as after interacting with an artifact or participating in a blood ritual with a more powerful vampire.

Single Attack: Attack rolls and damage (+3 points) for one specific kind of attack, such as "pistols," "kicks," or "Thrust"

Special Ability: Effects of one specific character ability, including damage for that ability (+3 points) if appropriate, but not attack rolls with that ability

The GM may allow you to spend XP to gain more blood shifts.

Strength: All tasks involving strength, including jumping and dealing damage with melee or thrown attacks (+3 points), but not attack rolls

Each blood shift eases the task by one step (except for shifts that affect damage, Armor, or recovery rolls, as specified in the list above). Applying two shifts eases the task by two steps, and applying three shifts eases the task by three steps.

You can assign your blood shifts to your character however you want, to a maximum of three in any one category. Once the shifts are assigned, you usually can't change them.

For example, a typical new vampire might put one blood shift into dexterity, one into healing, and one into resilience. Whenever they react to an ambush, dodge an attack, or resist physical trauma, the task is eased, and they're harder to hurt and heal faster than they used to, but they're not automatically better at hunting or scaring people than they were when they were alive. As another example, a spooky and sneaky assassin vampire might put one blood shift into accuracy, one into dexterity, and one into their Surprise Attack ability, making them very skilled at dispatching opponents in an ambush, but not tougher than they were as a living human.

The GM may have you choose all your starting blood shifts at the same time, or allow you to wait and choose them as you need them, like assigning one to strength when you need to break down a door. These decisions are permanent (you can't switch them around whenever you want), so choose carefully.

STANDARD VAMPIRE ABILITIES

All vampires have these abilities.

Pallor: Because in some ways you're technically dead, you don't look vibrant or healthy. No matter what your skin tone is, you look a little more pale than you did when you were alive. You might have dark circles under your eyes, or the

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whites of your eyes are discolored, or your face looks gaunt. Your skin is cold. There's something off about you or even sickly, like you have the flu, you're hung over, or you're really dehydrated. Makeup can help offset this look, but remember that you're also a supernatural predator, and that's unconsciously unnerving to people and animals. This look isn't enough to hinder social interactions, but people do tend to notice you and have a wary first impression. Enabler.

Undead Metabolism: Although vampires are mostly made of the same stuff as humans, vampire biology doesn't work quite like human biology. You are still considered a living creature for effects (such as an acid that damages flesh but not metal), but your Might defense rolls against disease and poison, and rolls to hold your breath, are eased by three steps. Enabler.

Vampiric Bite: You grab an opponent and immediately bite them (and can drink their blood if you want to). This attack is hindered by three steps, but the bite is eased because it is a light weapon, so overall it is hindered by only two steps. The bite inflicts 2 points of damage. Your foe can use its action to attempt to escape. After the first round, you can use your action to continue holding your foe, inflicting damage again and continuing to drink (unlike the initial attack, this action is not hindered). It takes three rounds to drink one meal's worth of blood.

In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to drain blood more quickly; each level of Effort used in this way reduces the time needed to finish a meal by one round. Action.

VAMPIRE GIFTS AND BLOODLINES

Some vampires have unusual abilities above and beyond superhuman endurance and reflexes. These abilities, usually called gifts or powers, are the things that make vampires truly strange and inhuman, such as hypnotizing people with a glance, commanding beasts, reading minds, or changing shape.

You can learn a gift in place of learning a new type or focus ability (such as one of the abilities you learn automatically upon reaching a new tier, or by spending 4 XP on other options for character advancement). Whether or not you learn any gifts is your choice—some vampires learn a few, some study them extensively, and some never learn or develop any gifts at all.

Gifts are grouped into categories called bloodlines. Bloodlines aren't rigid constraints, family lineages, or secret cabals—they're just a way that vampires categorize their gifts. You don't have to choose a specific bloodline, and you don't need someone to teach you a bloodline ability; you're merely learning how to unlock the potential within your supernatural essence. You can learn tier 1 gifts from any bloodline, even if that means that eventually you know abilities from several bloodlines. However, to learn a tier 2 or higher ability from a bloodline, you first have to know at least one lower-tier ability from that bloodline (or have a similar ability from your type or focus). For example, if you want to learn Mending of Proteus from the Morphic bloodline, you first need to learn a tier 1 Morphic gift (such as Bat Wings), or have an ability from your type or focus that is similar to one of the first-tier abilities from the Morphic bloodline.

When you bite an opponent, you could keep drinking their blood until they die,but you get the feeling that's not a good idea. You can automatically let go of an opponent reduced to 0 health from your bite and feeding (in other words, letting go is not an action).

Other options for character advancement, page 240

In the back of this book is the Vampire Abilities Reference Sheet, a page to add to your vampire character sheet. It lists your standard vampire abilities and has sections for your blood shifts and bloodline abilities. Vampire Abilities Reference Sheet, page 223.

At one point in history, vampire bloodlines may have been more discrete and limited to progeny of vampires from different parts of the world or even specific vampires who developed these abilities, but in the modern-day setting of Masters of the Night, this is no longer the case.

The GM might offer you a free tier 1 ability when or soon after you become a vampire, but there's a cost for accepting it . . .

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A Smile and a Word, page 108
Alley Rat, page 109
Awareness, page 111
Beast Call, page 112
Beast Companion, page 112
Beast Eyes, page 112
Call Swarm, page 118
Calm Stranger, page 118
Captivate or Inspire, page 118
Castigate, page 118
Cloud Personal Memories, page 119
Command, page 120
Communication, page 121
Control Swarm, page 122
Control the Savage, page 122
Dark Explorer, page 124
Dark Matter Shell, page 124
Daydream, page 124
Deadly Swarm, page 125
Deep Reserves, page 126
Dream Thief, page 132
Duplicate, page 132
Embraced by Darkness, page 133
Enhance Strength, page 134
Enhanced Physique, page 135
Escape Plan, page 136
Evanesce, page 136
Eye for Detail, page 138
Eyes Adjusted, page 138
Find the Hidden, page 140
Get Away, page 145
Greater Enhanced Physique, page 146
Hover, page 149
Illusory Disguise, page 150
Illusory Selves, page 150
Impossible Walk, page 151
Improved Companion, page 151
Influence Swarm, page 153
Invisibility, page 155
Know Their Faults, page 156
Knowing the Unknown, page 156
Learning the Path, page 157
Lethal Damage, page 158
Mind Control, page 162
Mind Reading, page 162
Minor Illusion, page 162
Nightstrike, page 166
Phased Attack, page 170
Precognition, page 171
Psychic Suggestion, page 172
Psychosis, page 172
Safe Fall, page 179
Slip Into Shadow, page 183
Soul Interrogation, page 184
Superior Duplicate, page 188
Telepathic, page 189
Terrifying Gaze, page 190
Terrifying Image, page 190
Terrifying Presence, page 190
Total Awareness, page 192
Wilderness Awareness, page 198

Other than this restriction, bloodline abilities are just like your other character abilities. Activating them costs points from your Pools, you can apply Effort if necessary, and so on. You can use blood shifts on specific bloodline abilities.

Animalist Bloodline

This bloodline gives you power over beasts, such as communicating with them, commanding them, summoning them to your presence, or emulating their abilities.

Tier 1: Beast Companion, Influence Swarm, Safe Fall

Tier 2: Communication, Control Swarm

Tier 3: Enrage Beast, Beast Eyes

Tier 4: Improved Companion, Wilderness Awareness

Tier 5: Beast Call, Call Swarm, Master's Command

Tier 6: Control the Savage, Deadly Swarm

Cognition Bloodline

This bloodline enhances your senses, allowing you to read thoughts or perceive things invisible to humans.

Tier 1: Eyes Adjusted, Learning the Path, Telepathic

Tier 2: Mind Reading, Nightstrike

Tier 3: Awareness, Eye for Detail, Know Their Faults

Tier 4: Find the Hidden, Soul Interrogation, Wilderness Awareness

Tier 5: Dark Explorer, Precognition

Tier 6: Knowing the Unknown, Total Awareness

Morphic Bloodline

This bloodline lets you change your body, such as by growing claws, transforming into a beast or a swarm of smaller creatures, or turning into mist.

Tier 1: Animal Form, Bat Wings, Vigor, War Flesh

Tier 2: Improved Animal Form, Mist Form, Sculpt Flesh, Swarm Form

Tier 3: Enhance Strength, Mending of Proteus

Tier 4: Greater Animal Form, Enhanced Physique, Deep Reserves

Tier 5: Greater Mist Form, Greater Swarm Form, Vampiric Regeneration

Tier 6: Greater Enhanced Physique, Lethal Damage

Presence Bloodline

This bloodline gives you conscious and unconscious power over minds, making you naturally irresistible, unnaturally intimidating, or able to control others' thoughts.

Tier 1: Cloud Personal Memories, Devoted Minion

Tier 2: A Smile and a Word, Calm Stranger, Terrifying Presence

Tier 3: Blood Bind, Psychic Suggestion

Tier 4: Castigate, Psychosis

Tier 5: Captivate or Inspire, Terrifying Gaze

Tier 6: Command, Mind Control

Shadow Bloodline

This bloodline manipulates thoughts, illusion, and reality itself to alter or hide your presence, confuse the senses of others, and create strange effects.

Tier 1: Duplicate, Minor Illusion, Slip Into Shadow

Tier 2: Illusory Disguise, Dream Thief, Get Away, Hover

Tier 3: Evanesce, Phased Attack, Superior Duplicate

Tier 4: Dark Matter Shell, Daydream, Illusory Selves

Tier 5: Impossible Walk, Invisibility, Terrifying Image

Tier 6: Alley Rat, Embraced by Darkness, Escape Plan

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BLOODLINE PLAYER INTRUSIONS

Players of vampire PCs have additional options for player intrusions based on their bloodlines. The following are example player intrusions for each bloodline.

Animalist—Tenacious Beast: An animal associated with the vampire shrugs off an attack that would kill, incapacitate, or remove it from the area. If the attack is an ongoing effect, the animal ignores it for several rounds.

Animalist—Unexpected Pet: An animal (of a type suitable for the vampire) shows up in the area and provides aid for whatever the vampire is doing, then leaves.

Cognition—Knowing What to Look For: Something in the area becomes apparent to you as a clear answer or course of action for overcoming a question, obstacle, or problem.

Cognition—Predictive Insight: You anticipate something occurring with just enough time to react before it happens. You can take an action before the triggering event happens (in combat, this means you act first in the surprise round).

Morphic—Inhuman Configuration: An attack, restraint, or other dangerous device has difficulty affecting your mutable flesh, missing you or perhaps temporarily malfunctioning.

Morphic—Perfect Costume: Your animal shape and behavior seem completely ordinary to humans and animals who can sense you, even if you actually look monstrous (like a human with bat wings) or act in ways that are unnatural (such as speaking or using a computer). Any monstrous or supernatural features you have (such as from Mist Form or War Flesh) are assumed to be special effects or high-quality prosthetics. Vampires probably aren't fooled in either case.

Presence—Overwhelming Greatness: People in the area are momentarily awestruck by you (out of fear, admiration, or some other emotional response), taking no actions for at least one round as long as they aren't attacked or threatened.

Presence—Past Influence: Someone you've interacted with in the past is in the area and willing to help you, either because you charmed them and they want to please you or because they are so afraid of you that they want you away from them as quickly as possible.

Shadow—Confident Bluff: Through a subconscious mix of illusion, reading minds, and warping reality, you pass yourself off as someone else, fooling everyone who can see you for a few rounds. This is less about projecting a specific image and more about carrying an air of authority and purpose; witnesses are more likely to believe you're a VIP they've never met than a celebrity they'd recognize on sight.

Shadow—Physics Shudders: For a few moments (perhaps a round or two), the world ignores you as if you don't exist, allowing you to walk past security cameras and squeeze through narrow spaces that barely allow air to pass through. Even energy is somewhat affected, halving damage you take from fire or even sunlight.

Player Intrusion, page 21

A vampire's beast companion might be a swarm of creatures like bats or rats instead of a single creature such as a dog. If so, the vampire's abilities that would affect a beast companion instead affect the swarm as a whole.

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VAMPIRE GIFTS

The hybrid form of the Animal Form ability looks strange and feral, like a classic Hollywood werewolf, regardless of what animal is chosen. Hybrid-form vampires aren't pretty.

Animal Form (3+ Intellect points): You change into an animal of approximately your size (such as a large dog or small bear) for up to ten minutes. Your equipment becomes part of the transformation, rendering it unusable unless it has a passive effect, such as armor. In this form your stats remain the same as your human form, but you can move and attack according to your animal shape (attacks from most animals this size are medium weapons, which you can use without penalty). Tasks requiring hands (such as using door handles or pushing buttons) are hindered when in animal form. You cannot speak but can still use blood shifts and all of your other vampire abilities that don't rely on human speech. You gain one minor ability associated with the creature you become. For example, if you turn into a leopard, you become specialized in climbing. If you transform into a bat, you can fly up to a long distance each round. If you transform into a fish, you can breathe underwater.

If you apply a level of Effort when you use this ability, you instead take a hybrid shape like your human form but with animalistic features, even if that animal is something much smaller than you (such as a bat or rat). In this hybrid form you can speak, use all of your vampire abilities, make attacks like an animal, and perform tasks using hands without being hindered. Anyone who sees you clearly in this hybrid form would never mistake you for a mere animal.

Action to change or revert.

DEVON
Lucky vampire Explorer who Masters Weaponry

Bat Wings (4 Might points): You can turn your arms into bat-like wings for up to ten minutes. You can hover in place or move at a rate of up to 20 feet (6 m) per round in any direction. When hovering or flying, you can also take one other nonmovement action on your turn (although when not on the ground, you can't use your arms for anything other than movement). Action.

Blood Bind (3 Might points): By giving a living creature (such as a human or dog) some of your vampire blood, you grant them some of your power.

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Either the recipient must drink a meal's worth of your blood (which immediately makes you less full) or it must be transfused directly into their veins using medical means. Once per day, the affected creature can make a recovery roll that is not an action and does not count toward their daily limit. Their attempts to resist your influence or special abilities are hindered by two steps. The effects last for a number of days equal to your tier (or twice that long if your blood is transfused instead of ingested). Enabler.

Devoted Minion: You gain a level 2 follower. This follower is loyal to you (or indebted to you in some way that makes them stick around like they're loyal to you), even if they're alive and they know you're a vampire. They're probably not willing to risk their life for you (especially against supernatural creatures) unless you provide them with weapons and defenses against those kinds of threats. Enabler.

Enrage Beast (3+ Intellect points): With a touch and a whispered word, you can trigger a biological response in a beast that is loyal to you or otherwise under your control. The beast flies into a bone-ripping rage for up to one minute. During this period, treat the creature as 2 levels higher than normal, and it inflicts an additional 3 points of damage each round. After this extreme effort, the creature either dies or becomes so enfeebled by its expenditure of energy that it becomes ineffective for several days. Each level of Effort you apply increases the temporary level of the creature (to a maximum of level 10) and damage done by 1 point. Action to initiate.

Greater Animal Form: When using Animal Form or Improved Animal Form, you gain the following additional bonuses: +1 to your Might Edge, +2 to your Speed Pool, and +1 to your Speed Edge. Enabler.

Greater Mist Form: In mist form, you gain the following additional bonuses: Speed defense tasks are eased, +2 Armor against energy attacks, and you can become opaque like a dense mist or return to normal at will. Enabler.

Greater Swarm Form: In swarm form, you gain the following additional bonuses: +1 to your Might Edge, +2 to your Speed Pool, and +1 to your Speed Edge. Enabler.

Improved Animal Form: When you use Animal Form, you can instead take on the shape of any natural creature no smaller than a large rat (attacks from most animals smaller than a wolf are light weapons). Your animal and hybrid forms can talk, and the transformation lasts for up to one hour. Enabler.

Master's Command (4 Intellect points): You can demand more of a beast that is loyal to you or otherwise under your control. One such creature within short range is granted an additional, immediate action, which they can take out of turn. Action.

Mending of Proteus (6 Intellect points): You restore points to your Might Pool or Speed Pool in one of two ways: either the chosen Pool regains up to 6 points, or it is restored to a total value of 12. You make this decision when you use this ability. Points are regenerated at a rate of 1 per round. In no case can this raise a Pool higher than its maximum. Action.

Full, page 156

Mist, page 221

Follower, page 233

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Mist Form (4 Intellect points): You change into a cloud of mist for up to ten minutes, filling an immediate area. You gain an asset to sneaking tasks and Speed defense tasks, but lose the benefit of any armor you wear. You can pass through any barrier that allows air to move through it (such as a fence, wire screen, cloth, or pipe), moving up to an immediate distance each round. You can't affect or be affected by normal matter, but energy attacks (like fire or explosions) and mental attacks still affect you. You cannot speak but can still use blood shifts and all of your other vampire abilities that don't rely on human speech or affecting physical matter (other than yourself). If large portions of the mist are separated (such as behind a closed door) when you return to human form, you move one step down the damage track. Action to change or revert.

Sculpt Flesh (3+ Intellect points): You alter your features and coloration for one hour, hiding your identity or impersonating someone. This is a cosmetic change; for example, if you give yourself the appearance of large muscles, your Might Pool doesn't change. You can't perfectly duplicate someone else's face, but you can be accurate enough to fool someone who knows that person casually. You have an asset in all tasks involving disguise. You must apply a level of Effort to be able to impersonate a different species (such as morphing into a humanoid alien). Action.

Swarm Form (4 Intellect points): You change into a swarm of small creatures (such as rats or bats) of approximately your size for up to one minute. In this form, your stats remain the same as your human form, but you can move and attack according to your animal shape, including flying (the swarm attack is a medium weapon that collectively inflicts 4 points of damage). As a swarm, your Might-based actions are hindered and your Speed-based actions are eased. Although your individual swarm animals must remain within immediate distance of each other, you can fit through any space that one of the individual animals could pass through (allowing you to move through something like a drain pipe). You cannot speak but can still use blood shifts and all of your other vampire abilities that don't rely on human speech. Pretending

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Just thinking about being impaired or debilitated from hunger makes you feel frantic and weird. When you're that *hungry, you think it would be really dangerous for any living creatures around you.*

to be a normal swarm of animals is eased by two steps, although doing things that an animal wouldn't normally do is likely to attract attention or give you away. If large portions of the swarm are separated (such as behind a closed door) when you return to human form, you move one step down the damage track. Action to change or revert.

Vampiric Regeneration: Your body heals itself even if you die from violence, as long as your body is mostly intact. One minute after your death, you make a free one-action recovery roll and become conscious again; however, your Intellect Pool maximum is permanently reduced by 2 points. Enabler.

Vigor (2+ Might points): You present yourself as fully living and human for the next hour. This negates the effects of your Pallor ability. For each level of Effort you apply, you can extend the duration for an additional hour. Action.

War Flesh: You can instantly transform your hands and feet into claws, and your human teeth into fangs, or revert to your normal human appearance. When you make attacks with your claws or fangs, they count as medium weapons instead of light weapons. Enabler.

HUNGER AND BLOOD

You're not dead—you're undead. You don't have a living metabolism like a human does, but that doesn't mean you can exist forever without eating, like a ghost or skeleton might. You have a stomach, feel hunger, and need to eat to live, and as a vampire that means you eat (or drink) blood, or something very much like blood.

Normally you need to feed once per day. However, unlike humans, you could feasibly gorge yourself a couple of times a week and starve yourself in between, and it wouldn't harm you in the long run.

A healthy adult human has about 10 pints (5 liters) of blood, so you can feed on a typical adult human from one to three times in a short period of time (about a week) without killing them. A human needs about four to six weeks to replenish a meal's worth of blood, so unless you want to kill them, you should leave them alone for a long time after you feed. If you want to survive by feeding in small amounts from the same group of people without killing

If you have Vampiric Regeneration, you might discover that this gift is both a blessing and a curse, because relying on it too much leaves you with a beast-like intellect. If your Intellect Pool is permanently reduced to 0 because of this, you become an NPC under the control of the GM.

Although an adult human has about 10 pints (5 liters) of blood, they'll die after losing about 4 pints (2 liters), which is why it's best to stop after one meal if you don't want to kill your victim.

Just thinking about all that delicious blood makes you feel weird. Like . . . maybe limiting how much human blood you drink isn't as easy as choosing not to have a second slice of pie for dessert. It feels like it's a lot harder than choosing to eat exactly one potato chip.

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HUNGER AND FEEDING FACTS

- Drinking a full meal of blood takes three rounds (although you can apply Effort to do it faster) using your Vampiric Bite ability to feed.
- A meal of blood is about 1 to 2 pints (.5 to 1 liters).
- Three meals are enough to make you completely full.
- Each complete day after your last feeding reduces your fullness by one meal.
- When your fullness reaches zero (three days after being completely full), you're very hungry. If you don't eat for three more days, you become impaired from hunger. In addition, any action you take that isn't directly related to feeding is hindered.
- If you don't eat for three more days after becoming impaired by hunger, you become debilitated (although you can still attack with the intent to feed). As with being impaired from hunger, any action you take that isn't directly related to feeding is hindered.
- Three days after becoming debilitated by hunger, you are unconscious but not dead (someone can revive you by feeding you).
- As long as you're conscious, even if one or more of your stat Pools is at 0, you can still attempt to feed, even if you can't take any other actions.

Debilitated, page 218

Vampiric Bite, page 149

You probably don't realize all of this stuff about feeding right after you become a vampire, but it's pretty instinctual and you'd figure it out soon enough, so it's here in the chapter for players.

Impaired, page 218

Animal blood is probably fine. It's like being a human on a restricted diet—paleo or gluten-free or low-sugar or vegetarian. You can do it, and it'll sustain you, but it's not the same as eating whatever you want. It's missing . . . something. And a diet of animal blood might limit some of your vampire abilities.

them, you could take a little bit of blood from a lot of people (at least twenty to thirty) over the course of a month.

Human blood smells the best, tastes the best, is the most filling, and is the best for you. You're *supposed* to drink human blood. Anything else probably isn't as good ("nutritious" probably isn't the right word in this context). If you're squeamish about feeding on humans, in theory you could drink animal blood or an artificial blood substitute, but you'd need to try it for a while to see if it has any effect on your abilities. There are lots of stories of vampires drinking stored blood (such as from a hospital or blood bank), so that's probably just as good as fresh human blood.

One reason to try animal blood is that animals are plentiful, especially in the wild. It's also legal to kill animals for food under most circumstances, and relatively inconspicuous (a small family farm with a few large animals isn't unusual, nor is a house with a yard and a lot of rabbits or chickens). Larger animals have a lot more blood than humans, and you probably can feed on them longer without killing them (of course, a larger animal is more easily able to fight back). If you're in a city, you have to rely on smaller animals

If you drink stored blood, you probably want to warm it up first (it's kept refrigerated so it lasts longer). And it probably tastes like you're eating a TV dinner instead of something from a good restaurant, but sometimes you can't be too picky.

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A vampire on a milk-only diet is a pathetic, weak-ass vampire, barely better than a human.

that have less blood, which means going through a lot more of them. If you tried to live off pigeons or rats, you'd probably need to feed on about a hundred of them each day, or about one every ten minutes that you're awake.

If you're desperate, try animal milk, coconut water, almond milk, soy milk, rice milk, or a similar substance. In many ways they're chemically similar to blood (especially animal milk), so they might be enough to tide you over for a while if you can't get actual blood. But it probably won't keep you very healthy—similar to how doing a juice cleanse will keep you from starving to death but isn't healthy for you.

What about artificial blood made in a lab? You don't know if it exists. Maybe other vampires are working on it, but if so, it's not ready to be shared. Or maybe they've perfected it and are keeping it a secret from the regular schlub vampires who have to hunt for their food.

BENEFITS OF FEEDING

You get hungry just like humans do, and you need to eat on a regular basis to remain healthy and sane. But eating at least one meal's worth of blood also gives you an immediate benefit: in addition to a nice euphoria (comparable to that of a strong cup of coffee and a shot of hard alcohol), you temporarily gain another blood shift. You choose what category this temporary blood shift applies to when you get it.

The temporary blood shift usually lasts for about ten minutes. One exception: if you use the blood shift for healing, that ten-minute duration is the window of time in which you can use your extra recovery roll, and the blood shift goes away immediately once you do so.

This temporary blood shift can exceed your normal limit of three blood shifts in a particular category. Feeding again while the temporary blood shift is active allows you to change what category it applies to, but you can never have more than one temporary blood shift from feeding at a time.

Note that you could feed, expend the temporary blood shift to make a recovery roll, and keep repeating those two things until you're fully healed. A severely wounded vampire is very dangerous to nearby humans for this reason.

VAMPIRE WEAKNESSES

According to the stories about vampires, your power comes at a price: you're vulnerable to sunlight, certain physical objects, and some kinds of energy.

At least, that's what you *think* is true. Vampire legends come from all over the world, and although the common tropes (garlic, sunlight, mirrors) are probably correct, there's so much mixed information that you can't be sure what's real or not. It's safe to test whether you have a reflection. It's probably safe to see if you're repulsed by garlic. It's probably dangerous to test whether sunlight hurts you—is it like a bad sunburn, or is it like sticking your hand in a campfire? Does it matter if it's cloudy out? Does sunblock help? Does it leave a scar? You get to decide if

Some feedings might be especially potent, providing two temporary blood shifts or one temporary blood shift that lasts longer than ten minutes.

Note your temporary blood shifts the same way you note your permanent ones. Vampire Abilities Reference Sheet, page 223.

Blood Shifts, page 148

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"Sunlight feels like I'm having a really bad migraine in the middle of a massive allergy attack and falling into a campfire. I don't recommend testing how accurate this description is."

—Zodiac, a vampire

Are there different grades of holy water? Like, is the stuff used for baptisms painful to vampires? Or is that like getting lemon juice in a paper cut, and a priest needs a stronger blessing to burn a vampire?

Decapitation or a stake through the heart would kill a living human, so it's not exactly a vampire weakness, right?

If an atheist holds a crucifix, does it work? Or does the object require faith?

What happens if you eat human food? Does it make you sick? Does it just rot in your stomach? Do you have to vomit it up?

If everyone bitten by a vampire became a vampire, the world would be overrun with the undead, so either that's not how it works or vampires take special precautions to prevent this. "Special precautions" probably means decapitation, dismemberment, or otherwise killing the victim's brain, zombie-style.

you're willing to risk experimenting on yourself, and how far you push it.

Below are a bunch of common vampire weaknesses that you might want to avoid, just in case. Or, if you're brave, you could see which of them are real and which are just stories.

- Sunlight
- Holy water
- Stake through the heart
- Decapitation
- Garlic
- Can't enter holy ground
- Silver
- Religious icons
- Can't cross running water
- Has to sleep in a coffin
- Can't enter a home without permission

CREATING NEW VAMPIRES

You don't know how to create new vampires. Maybe you have to be a powerful vampire to do it. Or maybe there's a trick to it? A creepy ritual? As with common aversions like sunlight and silver, the stories vary about how it's done. Some say that anyone bitten by a vampire will become a vampire. Some say that a human has to drink a vampire's blood to become a vampire. Older folk tales warn that a person will become a vampire if they rebel against an organized religion or perform witchcraft (but if that were the case, most of the world would be vampires by now).

All you know is that you don't know how to do it. Maybe you could figure it out if you had enough time and volunteers.

BITING OTHER VAMPIRES

Your teeth work, so obviously you could bite another vampire if you wanted to. But could you feed on another vampire like you feed on a human? Just thinking about it gives you the heebie-jeebies, like the idea of watching your parents have sex. Yeesh.

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This chapter is the hub of rules information for GMs running the Masters of the Night mini-campaign. In this setting, the PCs begin the first adventure (chapter 16) as newly created vampires, thrust into a modern world of crime and gangs, without more powerful vampires to give them orders or keep them in line. The PCs will have to learn about their abilities and weaknesses, navigate their new roles as criminal leaders, and protect themselves from rival gangs and other external threats, all while learning how to manage their hunger for human blood, the ethics of killing humans, and what to do with all of the bodies.

Chapter 13 has all the starting information players need to create their vampire characters. However, some information that's relevant to PCs is in this chapter for you to know and reveal to the players over time, such as whether the PCs are harmed by garlic or sunlight (aversions), whether they have to sleep in coffins or have a hideous appearance (quirks), the effects of drinking animal blood instead of human blood, and the game mechanics for being deprived of blood for too long. For information about the setting itself, see chapter 15.

Chapter 13 also provides character concept suggestions for the character types in the *Cypher System Rulebook*, each of which is appropriate for Masters of the Night. You may want to provide additional suggestions depending on where your campaign takes place and what other thematic or supernatural elements you want to include.

This chapter is intended for GMs only.

Chapter 16: Your Last Sunrise, page 187

Character Creation Steps for GMs

Follow these steps when you're ready to start a campaign with this material.

Decide whether you want the players to be ignorant or informed about the nature of the campaign when they create their characters. (The default option is "ignorant.")

Ignorant or Informed Character Generation, page 160

Have the players create characters (probably morally ambiguous ones who are more likely to fit the "shades of grey" nature of the campaign).

Chapter 13: Awakening, page 137

Decide if you want players to choose their blood shifts dynamically or statically. (The default option is "statically.")

Dynamic or Static Blood Shift Selection, page 160

Choose or roll aversions for each PC. (The default option is "roll.")

Vampire Aversions, page 164

Decide if you want to offer each PC a free tier 1 bloodline gift of their choice in exchange for a vampire quirk. (The default option is "no.")

Vampire Quirks, page 167

Bloodline gift, page 149

Start with the first adventure, "Your Last Sunrise."

Chapter 15: Your City at Night, page 173

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Ignorant or Informed Character Generation

There are two ways to introduce the players to this campaign:

Ignorant: The players create normal modern Cypher System characters, and they don't know their characters will become vampires. When you run the first adventure ("Your Last Sunrise"), the PCs will begin play having just been fully converted from human to vampire, and the players' surprise at this turn of events will mirror the experience of their characters and perhaps help them roleplay their characters' surprise.

Informed: The players create normal modern Cypher System characters and know that their PCs will soon be turned into vampires. This spoils the surprise of the start of the first adventure, but allows the players to create their characters with the setting in mind.

Which method works best for your group depends on your players—their ability to honestly roleplay a shocking change like becoming a vampire, how quickly they can accept their new diet and ethics, and so on. The assumption is that the players are running brand-new tier 1 characters when they start "Your Last Sunrise," but there's no reason you couldn't play through a few sessions (using your own adventure ideas or other published material) to get the feel of those PCs as humans and then have them become vampires at higher tiers.

New Vampires Starting at Higher Tiers, page 170

Dynamic or Static Blood Shift Selection

One of the primary differences between human and vampire PCs is that vampires have blood shifts—a type of power shift that enhances their physical, mental, or vampire abilities. Vampire PCs begin play with three blood shifts. You should decide the method the players use to assign their blood shifts: static or dynamic.

Blood Shifts, page 148

Power shift, page 292

Static: The players choose all of their blood shifts at once, allowing them to immediately know what their characters are good at. This is just like how players divide up the extra 6 Pool points from their type—those points are assigned before the character takes any actions, so the player knows exactly how big or small their Pools are.

Dynamic: This is a more creative option where the players don't choose their blood shifts until they decide to use each of them. In effect, they have three "floating" blood shifts that haven't been assigned, and they can assign them (permanently) as soon as they choose to exert their vampire power in a specific way. For example, in the starting adventure, the vampires are stuck behind a door held closed with a simple padlock. If a PC pulls on the lock to test it, the player could decide at that moment that their vampire is very strong and assign one of the character's three blood shifts to strength, allowing them to tear the lock open. Later, when thugs are shooting at that vampire, the player can decide that the PC is very fast and assign their second blood shift to dexterity, allowing them to dodge attacks more easily. Finally, after their character is hit by a car, the player can assign their last blood shift to healing, giving the vampire an extra recovery roll.

The advantage of the static method is that the players know immediately what their characters are good at; the disadvantage is that some players might experience choice paralysis as they spend time trying to figure out what

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their "best" option is. The advantage of the dynamic method is that it lets players react to situations and adjust their characters to their immediate needs; the disadvantage is that they may make a choice that's good in the short term but less interesting in the long term.

Just as you should work with the players if they're unhappy with their choice of type, descriptor, or focus, you can be open to the idea of a vampire changing their blood shifts (although doing so should require days or weeks of effort and perhaps spending 2 XP as a medium-term benefit). You can also allow vampires to gain additional blood shifts by spending XP.

Changing the Character Sentence

Changing from a human to a vampire brings along a host of physical, mental, and emotional changes. The ones who are most likely to survive the transformation and their later existence as a vampire are those who accept their new role as a bloodsucking monster that can't go out in daylight. The assumption for Masters of the Night is that the vampires—including the PCs—aren't good people. At best, a vampire PC is comfortable with shades of grey. If a player feels that their character isn't adjusting well to being a vampire, give the player the option to change the character's descriptor or focus to something more suitable for the narrative. (Chapter 13: Awakening lists suitable foci from the *Cypher System Rulebook* and has suggestions for playing each focus as a vampire PC.)

The method for changing a character's focus described in the *Cypher System Rulebook* has specific requirements, and it's usually meant for a voluntary change under gentler circumstances. The assumption here is that becoming a vampire is neither voluntary nor gentle, so it's okay to make things easier for the player. Instead of changing focus when the character gains a new tier, it can happen at any point in the PC's development. If the change seems appropriate, have it take effect within a few days or weeks of becoming a vampire. You can replace some, all, or none of the character's tier 1 abilities from their old focus and give them ones from their new focus—however much of a rewrite or reboot of the PC's game mechanics you and the player agree on.

Things to Know About Vampires

Here's some general knowledge about vampires and the setting where this narrative takes place.

Feeding on Blood

To state the obvious: vampires need blood to survive. Without it they starve, wither, and eventually fall into a coma-like state. Most vampires drink human blood, but some choose animal blood instead, and a few entirely avoid actual blood. These three diet categories have different effects on vampires.

HUMAN BLOOD

Human blood smells the best, tastes the best, is the most filling, and is the best for a vampire's needs. By keeping up on a steady diet of human blood, the vampire will be at their peak potential and will have full access to all of their supernatural abilities. Depending on how healthy a person is, a vampire can feed on a typical adult human from

Medium-term benefit, page 239

Gaining More Blood Shifts, page 170

Hunger and Feeding Facts, page 156

Switching Descriptors and Foci After Character Creation, page 437

The Cypher System Rulebook *says that a focus change shouldn't happen more than once in a character's career. The focus change described here doesn't count toward that.*

Although an adult human has about 10 pints (5 liters) of blood, they'll die after losing about 4 pints (2 liters). Because a meal is 1 to 2 pints, it's always risky to take two meals from someone in a short period of time.

A typical city hospital's blood bank usually has several hundred units of blood in storage at any particular time.

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A bloodmobile usually brings two or three large coolers for transporting donated blood, and each cooler holds up to 24 units. One unit is approximately equal to 1 pint (.5 liters).

Stored blood is good for about twenty to forty days, depending on the anticoagulant used.

Real-life PSA: if you can, please donate blood. It saves lives. Not a joke.

Vampire gifts, page 149

one to three times in a short period of time (about a week) without killing them. Because a healthy adult human has about 10 pints (5 liters) of blood and needs about four to six weeks to replenish a meal's worth of blood, a vampire could take a little bit of blood from a lot of people (at least twenty to thirty) over the course of a month and stay alive without killing any humans.

Stored human blood, like the kind in a blood bank, is essentially the same as fresh blood from a person.

ANIMAL BLOOD

Vampires who drink animal blood instead of human blood are sometimes called "vegetarian vampires" (which isn't vegetarian at all, of course). Vampires can subsist on animal blood, but they only *thrive* on human blood.

Vampires who don't drink human blood aren't quite as powerful as those who do. About ten days after a vegetarian vampire's last meal of human blood, they lose one blood shift (determined randomly) and all their vampire gifts are hindered. One meal of human blood reverses these losses within minutes.

One significant benefit to drinking animal blood instead of human blood is that animals are plentiful, and killing them for food is legal under most circumstances and relatively inconspicuous (a small family farm with a few large animals isn't unusual, nor is a house with a yard and a lot of rabbits or chickens). Larger animals have a lot more blood than humans and can provide more meals for a vampire. City vampires have to rely on smaller animals with a lower blood volume, which means going through a lot more of them (a vampire trying to live off rat blood would need to drink about a hundred rats' worth of blood each day, or about one every ten minutes of wakefulness).

BLOOD VOLUME AND NUMBER OF MEALS

Creature	Pints	Meals
Horse	110	11–33
Cow	80	8–24
Human	10	1–3
Deer	8	1–2
Large dog	5	1/2–1
Cat	1/2	1/16–1/8
Rabbit	1/4	1/32–1/16
Pigeon or rat	1/16	1/128–1/64

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BLOOD SUBSTITUTES

In desperate times, vampires can survive by drinking animal milk or plant-based liquids. Animal milk, coconut water, almond milk, soy milk, rice milk, and similar substances keep a vampire functional, but it's unnatural and barely meets the undead body's needs.

Vampires who don't drink human or animal blood aren't as powerful as those who do. About five days after a vegan vampire's last meal of human or animal blood, they lose one blood shift (determined randomly) and all their vampire gifts are hindered. Every five days beyond that without a proper meal (of human or animal blood) makes them lose another blood shift and hinders their vampire gifts by another step. A vampire who loses all blood shifts from this diet loses access to all their vampire gifts (but still has the Pallor, Undead Metabolism, and Vampiric Bite standard abilities). One meal of human blood reverses these losses within minutes, and one meal of animal blood does so within hours.

Feeding on blood substitutes never gives a vampire a temporary blood shift.

Presumably, someone could invent an artificial kind of blood that vampires could drink. Its potency would probably be somewhere between that of a plant-based blood substitute and animal blood. Human-quality artificial blood would revolutionize vampire culture and presence in the world. In the Masters of the Night setting, it's assumed that no such blood substitute exists.

LOSING CONTROL WHILE FEEDING

Most vampires are murderous monsters and don't care if the creature they're feeding on lives or dies. Some vampires try to keep a low profile and stop after taking one meal from a creature so their victim can go on living. However, showing that much restraint is like deciding to eat exactly one potato chip.

Whenever a vampire consumes a meal's worth of blood, you can introduce a GM intrusion to the situation. The vampire must make a level 3 Intellect defense roll or continue feeding on that source for another meal. If the vampire is a vegetarian, this task is hindered; if a vegan, it is hindered by an additional step. If the vampire has blood shifts in intelligence (which normally ease Intellect defense rolls), they have no effect on the roll to stop feeding. The vampire can still disengage when the subject dies (as normal), although if this compelled feeding isn't enough to provide a full meal, the vampire is hindered in all tasks (except feeding) until they finish their meal (which means finding another source of food).

Feeding on blood substitutes never triggers this reaction—that stuff, no matter its quality, doesn't have the same visceral effect as human or animal blood.

A vampire with the savage quirk always has to make an Intellect defense roll to stop feeding after one meal (no GM intrusion required).

EATING HUMAN FOOD

New vampires can still eat human food, and (sort of) digest it in the human fashion, but it doesn't taste quite as good as it did when they were alive. Blood is just more filling and satisfying than human food.

This tolerance for human food decreases over time. Within a week of becoming a vampire, eating solid food

Vampires who only drink blood substitutes are jokingly called "vegan vampires."

In True Blood (2008 TV show), vampires have perfected a blood substitute that sustains them.

Why does the compulsion to keep feeding happen sometimes and not other times? Perhaps the blood tastes especially good or has some trace element the vampire is craving. Perhaps the vampire is especially hungry at that moment. Or angry. Who knows?

Standard vampire abilities, page 148

Savage, page 168

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causes painful cramps. By the second week, it causes nausea (all actions are hindered for one hour after eating). By the third week, it causes vomiting within a minute of eating, followed by hours of nausea. The symptoms continue to get worse as time goes on; there are surprising and dramatic stages beyond projectile vomiting. A vampire won't die from eating human food, but it will make them extremely uncomfortable.

Human drinks, as long as they're actual liquids (rather than pureed solids), remain somewhat tolerable to vampires for much longer than solid food—roughly two to three times longer. If the human drink is mixed approximately equally with blood, even an elder vampire can enjoy them. Coffee, hot chocolate, and mulled wine are common options that (to a vampire) mix the best of both kinds of flavors.

These mixed beverages also make it easier for vampires to mingle at parties, hang out at bars, attend nighttime sporting events, or participate in toasts.

Vampire Sleep

Like humans, vampires need to rest about eight hours in each twenty-four-hour period, but vampires sleep during the daytime. To be fair, it's not actually "sleep," but most vampires call it that out of habit from their human days. This resting is a supernatural lethargy that can't usually be overcome by caffeine or force of will. A vampire can't simply decide to stay up all day and will eventually nod off, perhaps while standing up, leaning against a wall, or (depending on their gifts) hanging from a ceiling or hiding somewhere.

Most vampires "sleep" with their eyes open and are known to look at anything moving in their field of view, even if they're too tired to move. A clever sleepy vampire might prop themselves up and pretend to be awake this way.

Starting an hour after sunrise, a vampire must make a level 3 Might defense roll every ten minutes to remain conscious; otherwise, they fall asleep. A vampire who falls asleep while trying to remain conscious can retry this task once per minute to wake back up.

Retrying a Task After a Failure, page 212

If a vampire is not able to rest or their rest is interrupted, all of their tasks are hindered by two steps until they can complete their normal rest period. Vampires with the catatonic quirk have it especially bad, and are basically paralyzed while they sleep.

Catatonic, page 167

Vampire Aversions

As undead, vampires are vulnerable to things that are harmless to living creatures. Sunlight, garlic, and religious icons are part of the folklore about vampires, but stories conflict about which of these things actually work. For example, according to European folklore, vampires were merely nocturnal rather than being harmed by sunlight, and even Dracula was only weakened (not killed) during daylight hours.

Part of the theme of this setting is that vampires are weakened by sunlight and strong displays of religious faith, so as a baseline, all vampires have at least a weak aversion to sunlight and religious power. However, to make each vampire PC unique and add to the mystery and discovery process of their vampire nature, no two vampires have exactly the same aversions, or the same degree of aversion to some things.

The GM rolls three times on the Vampire Aversion table for each PC to see what the character's aversions are. These aversions should become apparent within a day or two of the vampire's transformation, as their mortality fades away and their undead nature becomes prominent. Rolling a particular aversion multiple times means an increased effect on that vampire, called a *degree*.

Staking and decapitation are just as fatal to humans as they are to vampires, so they're not on the aversions table. However, some powerful vampires "slain" with these methods can revive if the stake is removed or the head is reattached within a short amount of time.

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VAMPIRE AVERSION TABLE

d100	Vampire Aversion
01–10	Arithmomania
11–20	Garlic
21–30	Inhospitality
31–40	Mirrors
41–60	Religious power
61–70	Running water
71–80	Silver
81–00	Sunlight

DEGREES OF AVERSION

Depending on how many times an aversion was rolled (plus the baseline aversion to sunlight and religious power), a vampire's aversion level toward something is one of five degrees of intensity: *none*, *weak*, *average*, *strong*, or *lethal*.

None: The vampire is not adversely affected, at least not any more than a typical human might be. This is the default for most vampire aversions (there is no need to mark this on the vampire's character sheet).

Weak: The vampire's actions are hindered when within an immediate distance of their aversion.

Average: The vampire's actions are hindered by two steps when within an immediate distance of their aversion and by one step when within a short distance of it.

Strong: As an average aversion, plus the vampire is impaired when within immediate range of it, and may have other penalties specific to their aversion.

Lethal: As an average aversion, plus the vampire is impaired when within close range of it and debilitated when within immediate range of it, and may have other penalties specific to their aversion.

AVERSION DESCRIPTIONS

Arithmomania: An obsessive need to count things. Although in most cases this is only mildly distracting and manifests as a need to count important things in the area (such as "four humans, two doors, and seven crates"), it becomes debilitating if the vampire suddenly finds a large number of small items, such as spilled seeds or grains of rice. Once the vampire has counted these items (which may take rounds, minutes, or hours, depending on the number of items), any penalties from this aversion go away. A vampire with a

The Vampire Aversion table assumes a North American or European type of vampire. GMs in other regions (or who want to run a game set in another part of the world) should feel free to add or replace items in this list with appropriate geographical or cultural vampire aversions, such as aloe vera (South America), salt, specific local plants, and so on.

Impaired, page 218

Debilitated, page 218

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Note that for an arithmomaniac vampire's routine obsession with counting, the GM can assume that the vampire automatically counts all of the relevant objects within view, and not waste time giving exact counts for things.

Vampires with garlic aversion should not feed on the blood of a creature who has eaten garlic in the past day or so (it counts as being within immediate range).

Some vampires who were religious in their human lives have an aversion to the power of that faith but not other faiths, suggesting that this aversion might be a supernatural manifestation of the vampire's guilt rather than an external force.

Vampires with an aversion to mirrors usually don't cast a shadow, although lacking a shadow doesn't cause them any harm. Vampires without an aversion to mirrors have normal shadows and reflections.

As an alternative, you can split the aversion to mirrors into analog and digital categories so that vampires might be visible to mobile phones but not film cameras, or vice versa.

The silver content in common coins used to be enough to harm a vampire by touch, but most modern "silver" coins are now made with a mixture of copper and nickel.

strong or lethal degree of this aversion must make a level 4 Intellect defense roll every round they are within range of a large number of small countable objects; failure means they spend their next action counting.

Garlic: An edible plant used as a seasoning. The unobstructed presence of garlic bulbs, cloves, powder, salt, or paste is enough to trigger a reaction. A strong smell of garlic on food or even a person's breath is not quite as effective (treat the degree of aversion as one less than normal). Striking garlic to a vampire with a strong aversion inflicts 2 points of damage, or 4 points if it has a lethal aversion.

Inhospitality: A cultural contract allowing passage in open spaces and requiring permission to enter a private building. A vampire with a strong aversion to inhospitality takes 2 points of damage per round it remains within a private space uninvited; one with a lethal aversion cannot voluntarily enter such a space at all.

Mirrors: An inability to cast a reflection in a mirror. On film, video, and digital visual recordings, the vampire doesn't have a normal (humanlike) appearance—they look blurred, warped, grossly distorted, monochromatic, like a photo negative, or something equally strange. This aversion affects the vampire only if they can see the effect, such as if someone holds a mirror toward them or shows them a live video feed of where they are standing.

Religious Power: Objects and areas imbued by positive ("good") supernatural power. The mere presence of a religious symbol may be sufficient (whether hanging on the wall or in the hands of an unbeliever), but in some cases the aversion is triggered only when the icon is held, worn, or presented by a person of strong faith. Consecrated ground applies to an aversion, although if that ground has been tainted by actions contrary to the faith, its power may be greatly weakened. Striking a vampire with a religious symbol or a cup-sized splash of holy water inflicts 2 points of damage if it has a strong aversion, or 4 points if it has a lethal aversion. A vampire with a strong aversion takes 2 points of damage per round it remains within a consecrated space; one with a lethal aversion cannot voluntarily enter such a space at all and (if moved there by an outside force) takes 4 points of damage per round it remains within the space.

Running Water: A significant body of water that is actively moving, such as a stream, river, or ocean (ponds, moats, and lakes generally don't count unless they have a current caused by a qualifying source). A vampire with a strong or lethal degree of this aversion cannot cross running water on their own, including using bridges, and must make a level 4 Might defense roll every round they are above or in contact with the water; failure means they immediately fall unconscious (they revive if removed from the water).

Silver: A bright metal with a reputation for purity and power against the supernatural (and microbes). Anything less than about 6 ounces (170 g) or one cubic inch (16 cubic cm) won't hinder a vampire in its vicinity. Merely touching a vampire with a silver weapon (or other

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object of reasonable size, such as a silver ring) inflicts 1 point of damage if it has a strong aversion, or 2 points if it has a lethal aversion. Striking a vampire with a silver weapon adds a free level of Effort to damage for a strong aversion, or two free levels of Effort for a lethal aversion.

Sunlight: The direct light of the sun on a typical day with no clouds. A vampire with a strong aversion takes 4 points of damage per round it remains in direct sunlight or 2 points per round in indirect sunlight. A vampire with a lethal aversion takes 6 points of damage and moves one step down the damage track each round it remains in direct sunlight, or 4 points of damage per round in indirect sunlight. Vampires treat their aversion as one degree less than normal when fully covered (including sunglasses and a hat) or on a heavily overcast day, or two degrees less at twilight.

VAMPIRE QUIRKS

The transition from mortal to vampire is not perfect. Sometimes things go wrong, and a vampire ends up with a strange flaw. Depending on the philosophical outlook of the vampire in question, they may call this flaw a quirk or curse. You may decide to give a vampire a quirk as a type of lasting or permanent damage instead of death.

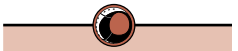
d100	Quirk
01–15	Catatonic
16–25	Coffin-bound
26–35	Deathlike
36–45	Hideous
46–60	Savage
61–75	Sensitive
76–85	Soil-bound
86–00	Starving

Catatonic: The vampire is nearly helpless when resting during the day. To rise from their rest for ten minutes, they must make a level 4 Might defense roll; otherwise, they may be alert but are effectively paralyzed until the sun goes down. The vampire can retry this task once per minute.

Coffin-bound: The vampire has an unusual attachment to the coffin they rested in while their body transformed from human to vampire. If they don't rest for about eight hours during the day in their coffin, the next night they do not regain their one-action recovery roll. Two nights in a row of this means they also lose their ten-minute recovery roll. Resting in their coffin for a full eight hours ends these penalties.

Deathlike: The vampire has the appearance of someone who has just died—blue lips and nails, darkened skin in the hollows of the face, and overall corpse-like pale skin (or noticeably paler skin for people who had dark skin when alive). This is a more severe form of the Pallor vampire ability. All positive social interaction tasks are hindered. The Vigor gift can overcome this, but the vampire must apply a level of Effort just for this purpose.

Hideous: The transformation into a vampire has made the vampire inhumanly ugly. They have long nails, pointed ears, weirdly prominent teeth (and perhaps visible fangs), a hunched posture, and so on. All positive social interaction tasks are hindered. The Sculpt Flesh gift can overcome this, but the vampire must apply a level of Effort just for this purpose.



Free level of Effort, page 209

Retrying a Task After a Failure, page 212

Although moonlight is reflected sunlight, it's only about a hundredth of the intensity of the sun at twilight, so it has no harmful effect on vampires. Some of the earliest modern vampire stories actually have vampires being healed by moonlight.

Any source that creates intense ultraviolet (UV) light should have the same effect on a vampire as sunlight. In other words, vampires should avoid tanning beds, and blacklights can irritate vampires with strong or lethal aversions.

The coffin-bound quirk never seems to happen to people who were left to transform out in the open, such as in a forest, in an empty field, or on the floor of a storage room. Depending on the circumstances of their transformation, a coffin-bound vampire might have to rest in a morgue drawer, a chemical barrel, some other container, or on a specific couch.

Pallor, page 148

Vigor, page 155

Lasting or permanent damage, page 436

For the hideous quirk, think of Count Orlok from Nosferatu *or* Shadow of the Vampire.

Sculpt Flesh, page 154

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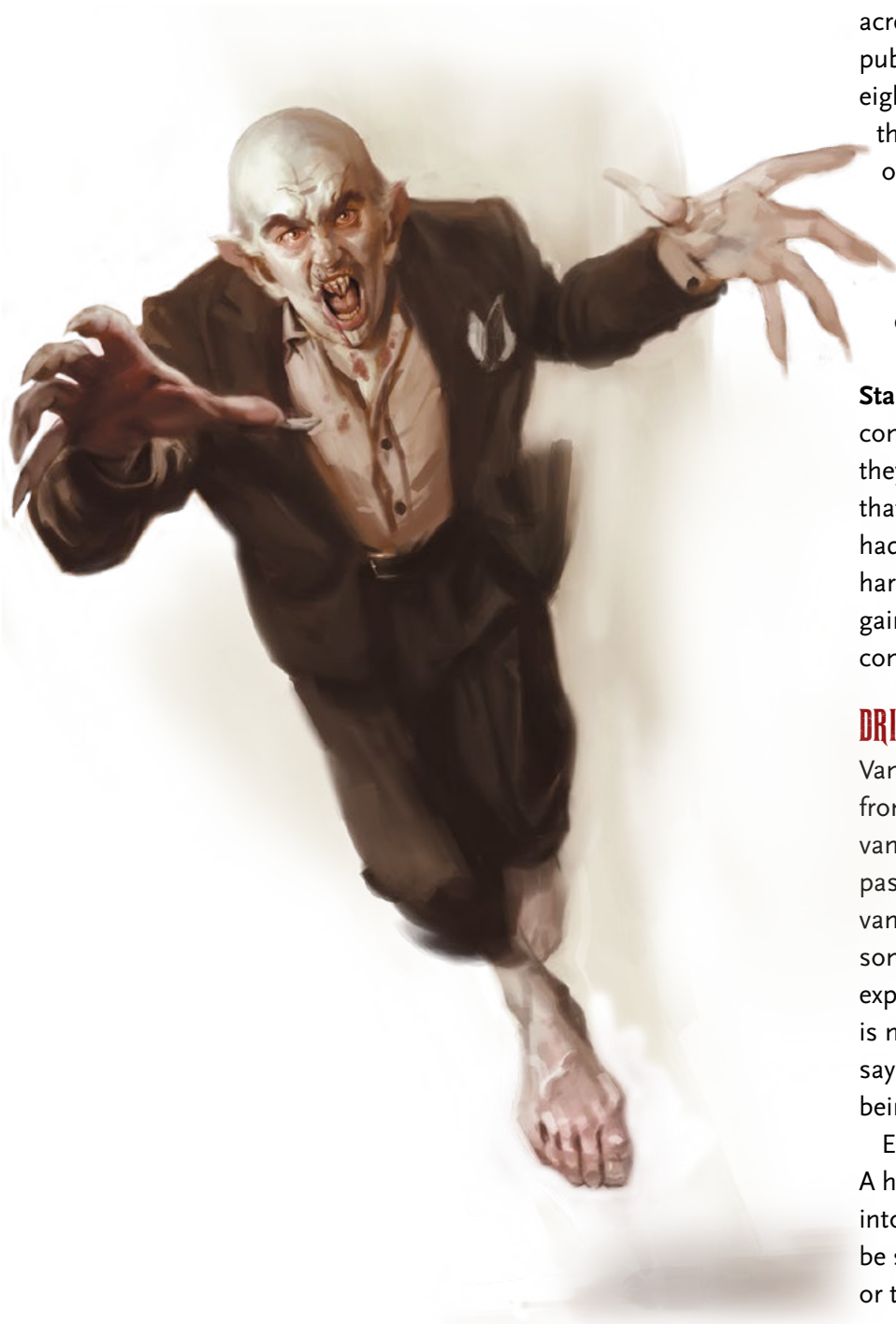
Losing Control While Feeding, page 163

Savage: Once the vampire starts feeding, they have a hard time stopping. Every time they consume human or animal blood, they risk losing control and continuing to feed from their target (often resulting in the target's death). For most vampires, having to overcome this risk is a GM intrusion, but a savage vampire *always* must battle this urge (and the GM doesn't award them XP for it).



Sensitive: Make two additional rolls on the Vampire Aversion table. Reroll any result that would increase an aversion beyond "lethal."

Soil-bound: The vampire has an unusual attachment to the earth, usually the soil that surrounded them when they were buried or their home soil (generally an area no larger than an acre, such as a family plot or part of a public park). If they don't rest for about eight hours during the day in this earth, the next night they do not regain their one-action recovery roll. Two nights in a row of this means they also lose their ten-minute recovery roll. Resting in their home soil for a full eight hours ends these penalties.

Starving: The vampire can't efficiently consume or process food. Every time they feed, there is a 50 percent chance that it has no effect on them, as if they hadn't eaten anything. The feeding still harms their target, but the vampire gains no benefit from the blood they consumed.

Drinking From the Dying and Dead

Vampires are supposed to drink blood from the living, not the dying. If a vampire drinks blood from someone past the moment of their death, the vampire is stunned. According to some, this is because the vampire experiences the human's death, which is momentarily overwhelming. Others say it's because the vampire's soul risks being drawn away when the mortal dies.

Exactly when this occurs is a fine line. A human who's been beaten or bled into unconsciousness by combat might be safe to feed on for another round or two, or perhaps for several minutes

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afterward. Humans are a confusing mix of frail and tenacious, and it's hard to say whether a particular human might hold onto life for a long time or suddenly expire.

If you think a vampire is pushing their luck by trying to feed on a human who is dying, use a GM intrusion to represent this risk—the human dies, and the vampire is stunned for one round. Each round thereafter, the vampire continues to drink from the body (which gives the vampire no benefit) and must make a difficulty 5 Intellect defense roll to break out of this stupor. If they fail three times in a row, they move one step down the damage track. This continues until the vampire breaks free or moves beyond "debilitated" on the damage track.

Remember that a typical human will die after losing about 4 pints (2 liters) of blood, and a typical meal of blood is about 1 to 2 pints (.5 to 1 liter), so trying to get more than two meals out of a typical human should always trigger a GM intrusion for the human's death.

Even after a human has died, its body usually has some blood in it. A vampire can safely drink this blood without risking harm to itself (although because the dead person's heart isn't beating, the vampire may need to elevate the corpse's limbs to make blood flow toward the bite area). Under normal circumstances, a corpse has about one meal's worth of blood left in it, if consumed within an hour of death. Blood from a human corpse has lost much of its vitality and is only as nourishing as animal blood. (Blood taken from a living person and stored, such as in a blood bank, does not have this problem).

All of these issues also apply to feeding on dying or dead animals. Blood from an animal corpse is only as nourishing as blood substitutes.

Drinking from Other Vampires

Vampires can drink from each other, although it is rare. There's a natural abhorrence for it, akin to a combination of cannibalism and incest. Assuming the hungry vampire can overcome this feeling (which may be a combination of roleplaying and making Might or Intellect defense rolls), feeding on another vampire is as nourishing as drinking human blood. There is no risk of the feeding vampire losing control while feeding.

In theory, a vampire could feed on itself, but this only gives the sensation of feeding and doesn't help the vampire survive. That way lies madness.

In effect, feeding on a vampire transfers a meal from the donor to the recipient. The donor vampire immediately becomes less full. A vampire that doesn't have at least one meal in it can't feed another vampire this way.

Fullness, page 156

Setting Difficulty Ratings by PC Tier

As described in the *Cypher System Rulebook* under Balancing Encounters, the concept of a balanced encounter itself is not a philosophy embraced by the Cypher System. The system is about fun, not about matching creatures of a particular level to PCs of a particular tier.

Some manifest cyphers and artifacts for this setting may be derived from vampire blood. These items don't have the stigma or abhorrence of drinking blood from another vampire.

That said, a problem can arise for PCs in Masters of the Night if the challenges are too easy. The *Cypher System Rulebook* provides guidelines for dealing with this issue, but those guidelines don't necessarily assume that the PCs have blood shifts bolstering their raw power level. The following table supplements the guidance in the *Cypher System Rulebook*. You could use it to adjust selected difficulties based on PC tier (which presumes the number of blood shifts the PC likely possesses based on their tier). Don't adjust the difficulty for every creature or NPC the characters face; otherwise, why be a vampire in the first place? It's up to you

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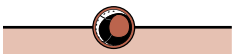
whether the adjustment is due to blood shifts or simply because the challenge you fashioned is particularly tough.

PC Tier	Creature Difficulty/ Level Adjustment
1	+1 to +2
2	+2 to +3
3	+3 to +4
4	+4 to +5
5	+5 to +7
6	+6 to +9



Long-Term Benefits, page 239

OPTIONAL RULES

The following sections are optional rules you may want to use for your vampire PCs. As always, if you don't like how these rules affect the campaign, you can change your mind and stop using them (in the case of purchasing additional blood shifts, the PCs should be refunded the XP they spent).

NEW VAMPIRES STARTING AT HIGHER TIERS

Some foci in the Cypher System Rulebook, *such as Builds Robots, allow a PC to create one weak companion creature. That should give you a sense of how difficult it should be for a PC to gain an ability to create as many minions as they want.*

The Masters of the Night setting assumes that all newly risen vampires are tier 1 characters, which allows them to learn and improve their undead abilities as they advance to higher tiers. However, if you want the PCs in your campaign to reach higher tiers before they become vampires, it works the same way: a new vampire starts with three blood shifts, all standard vampire abilities, and aversions. Even though a character is higher than tier 1, they have to gain a first-tier ability from a bloodline before they can select a higher-tier ability from that bloodline (in other words, a tier 3 character who becomes a vampire can't skip taking a tier 1 bloodline ability and go right to taking a tier 3 ability).

Blood Shifts, page 148

Standard Vampire Abilities, page 148

Vampire Aversions, page 164

The adventures for Masters of the Night assume that the PCs are first-tier vampires. Higher-tier vampires may find the combats in those adventures too easy, so you should be ready to adjust those encounters to make them suitably challenging for the characters.

GAINING MORE BLOOD SHIFTS

Vampires start with three blood shifts and automatically acquire another at tiers 2, 4, and 6. If your players are interested in gaining more than this amount, you can allow them to spend 10 XP for each blood shift as a long-term benefit.

CREATING NEW VAMPIRES

Vampires propagate their kind by turning humans into new vampires—thus, the PCs. However, the characters aren't told how to do this. This is a deliberate design choice for the setting; otherwise, the PCs could abuse the rule to create an army of vampires, which would be like trying to run a spooky zombie apocalypse game by giving each PC a tank and unlimited ammunition.

Keep the ability to create new vampires under wraps and out of the hands of PCs for as long as possible (if not permanently). A character who wants to develop or learn such an ability probably should have to do a lot of research and experimentation, with many dangerous, horrible, and disgusting failures along the way. If they persist despite these failures, you can talk to the player about how this appears to be a difficult and unreliable process and may take years of game time to have a breakthrough.

If the PCs still persist and you decide to allow this ability in the game, it should be high-tier (at least tier 4)

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and require a significant expenditure of Might points (representing the vampire's blood being fed or infused into the recipient) and XP.

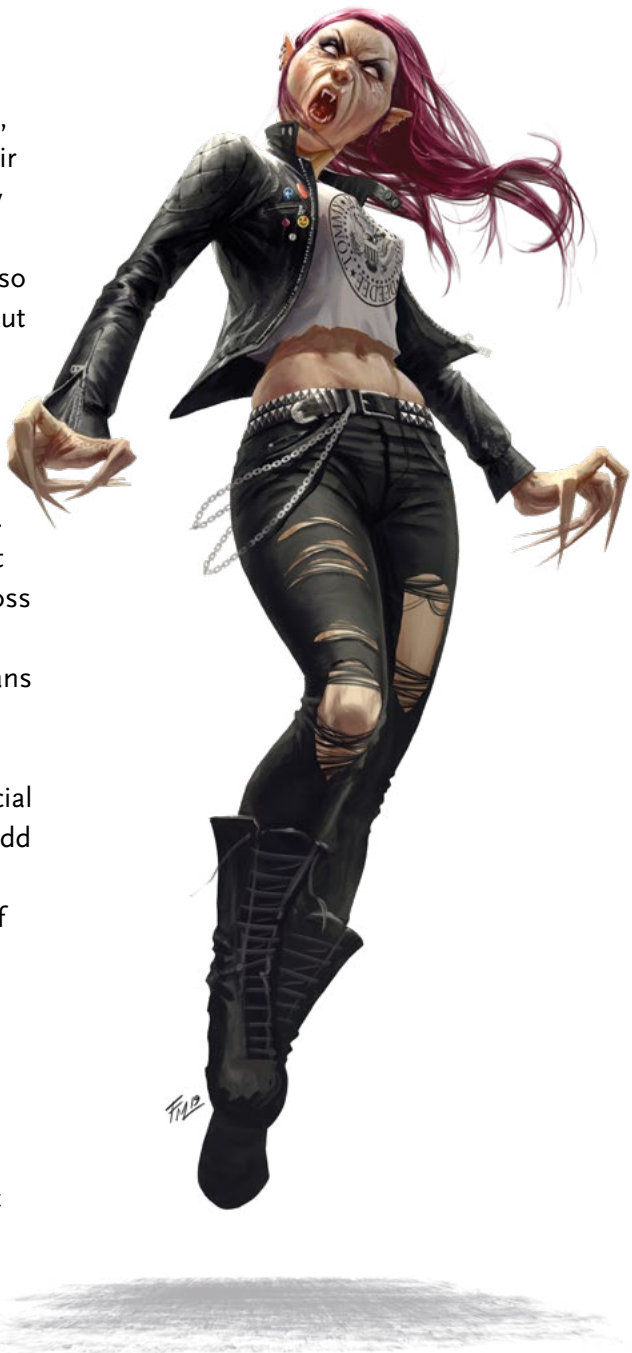
ADDING FLAVORFUL EFFECTS

Part of the fun of playing a vampire is being the source of weird incidental things that vampires naturally do to inspire fear or show their power. For example, a vampire hunting someone in the darkness momentarily has red glowing eyes. A vampire trying to intimidate someone into answering questions "vamps out" for an instant, manifesting fangs and contorting their face into something monstrous. They suddenly appear younger or older to evoke sympathy. They seem to move so fast across a room that they appear out of nowhere. An approaching vampire seems to slide forward with its feet inches above the floor. Lights flicker or dim in their presence. Words on a page squirm into new configurations. Creepy animals lurk nearby, staring at intruders. Eerie damp mist flows across the ground or floor like a cold river. Mysterious whispers, clicks, and groans make a room feel haunted.

Rather than requiring a vampire PC to spend XP buying a half-dozen special abilities to do these things, you can add them as flavor to events in response to what the characters do. These brief manifestations of incidental power usually don't ease or hinder tasks, nor do they overcome aversions or quirks, but they can if you want them to. It's appropriate to lean on a PC's vampire gifts to provide this flavor. For example, a vampire with Morphic bloodline abilities is more likely to "vamp out" for effect, and a vampire with Animalist abilities is more likely to have weird animals in their vicinity (which conveniently gives the character an animal to use their gifts on).

Once the players see you using these flavorful effects, let them know that they can use them too, particularly as minor and major effects on their rolls. These effects are mainly for establishing a creepy, weird atmosphere and giving vampire PCs the opportunity to show off in cinematic ways. Players who enjoy

Special Rolls, page 210



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dramatically narrating their attacks should gravitate to using these as part of their descriptions as well.

Note that unless the PC is trying to prove that vampires are real, or is using these tricks in front of a group of witnesses, any human who sees these effects will probably think they're imagining things, they've been drugged, or what they saw was just a trick of the light. Self-delusion is a powerful survival tool for humans, and most people would rather believe that they were confused than accept that vampires are real. In other words, the PCs should feel free to play with these narrative toys without worrying that they're revealing too much.

HORROR MODULES

Chapter 7: Encyclopedia of Horror Mechanics, page 84

Chapter 7 discusses horror modules in detail. This section shows how you can use certain modules to help build the dark atmosphere in a Masters of the Night mini-campaign.

Hallucination Reset: This module is particularly useful in the early parts of the campaign when the vampire PCs are still coming to terms with their new status as nocturnal killers. Examples include a frightening dream or hallucination of the PC or another vampire attacking their loved ones (even if this takes place in the past when said loved ones were still alive or innocent), vampire hunters discovering the PC and killing them, burning to death from exposure to sunlight (or having similar reactions to other aversions), or elder vampires returning to drink their blood. In the late stages of the campaign (once the angels have appeared), the PCs might dream of angels appearing in otherwise innocuous situations and smiting them with holy power.

Chapter 19: The Hunted, page 215

Horror Mode: This module should come into play as the vampires are learning about their new strengths, activating their bloodline abilities for the first time, and having to confront other vampires or powerful supernatural creatures.

Instant Panic: Although the PCs quickly adapt to their own abilities and become used to the idea that vampires are real, confronting a more powerful vampire (or, eventually, an angel) should be a frightening experience, similar to a normal human facing a vampire. The GM may not use this module for most of the campaign, but bringing it out when needed can add a real sense of terror into a group of PCs who have been playing with the idea of being immortal and invincible.

Perilous Venture: Because the ritualistic aspects of vampirism are mostly out of the PCs' hands, this module is likely to come into play only in the endgame of the campaign, when the characters are trying to find a solution to the overwhelming threat. Both options presented in the adventure "The Hunted" can be run as perilous ventures using this module.

Shock: Similar to Instant Panic, this module will probably be rare in the campaign, but it can be an effective GM tool to show how traumatic certain events are for the vampire PCs.

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This chapter has the setting info for running the Masters of the Night mini-campaign. It is called "*Your* City at Night" because instead of placing the narrative in a fictional city or a real city that might be unfamiliar to you, the idea is that your campaign takes place in a city you know well. Perhaps it's your hometown, your current city, or a good-sized city that's close to where you live now. By setting the action there, you know the look and feel of the place, and you can fill in any extra details you need to make the campaign feel complete. So instead of the PCs waking up in a storage container in the dock district of Metro City or Brooklyn, the storage container will be on a street that's familiar to you, and you can describe what's around it because you've been there. Instead of having two vampire gangs duke it out after-hours in a generic big box store on a randomly named street, the fight is "at the Target on the west side of town near Terry's favorite pizza place." You don't need us to use pages in this book to describe or map mundane details like streets, highways, bridges, and parks—you can just use maps of your chosen city (either paper or online).

The Gangs of the City section has information on vampire gangs and their criminal enterprises, which you can place in your city wherever you see fit. The adventures in this book still provide specific details like maps of buildings for encounters to make it easier to explain things in the text, but you can use floor maps or blueprints for comparable businesses in your city and adjust the encounters to suit those locations.

The key is to present your city through a dark, corrupt lens. Criminal gangs run by vampires control different regions, carving up turf like a savory pie and skirmishing along the borders when tempers are hot and profits are down. The local politicians probably aren't vampires (it's hard to keep up that façade when your work requires daytime meetings), but they're likely on the take or in the pocket of shady business interests with ties to the vampire gangs.

Hopefully the real version of your city is a safe and good place to live (and doesn't have any undead). Once you embrace that the campaign takes place in a version of the world where vampires are real (perhaps a parallel dimension or alternate timeline), you can skew other details to give your city a creepy vibe. Here are a few examples of one change making a big difference in the game's version of your city:

- A major elected official (mayor, governor, or president) is a different person, such as a sleazy reality TV star or a business owner with ties to the mob. This official is making decisions and pushing legislation to

This chapter is intended for GMs only.

I once ran an In Nomine campaign set in my home city of San Diego. Knowing every street, freeway, and restaurant downtown meant I knew what was nearby for every action scene, and could flesh out the background and drop in supplemental characters as needed from my own memories. The local Italian restaurant was "neutral ground" for both angels and demons, which led to some tense dinners.

Gangs of the City, page 182

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enrich themselves and their friends at the expense of regular people.

- A recent law was passed legalizing gambling. Now one neighborhood is overrun with shabby casinos that are eyesores and drive up crime statistics.
- A major business lays off a large number of employees, perhaps due to outsourcing for cheaper labor or to make the end-of-year numbers look good and boost executive bonuses. This results in a lot of people struggling to find work and make ends meet.
- A natural disaster like an earthquake, hurricane, tornado, or major fire destroys many small businesses and homes. This stalls the economy and makes a large number of people homeless.
- Budget cuts force the closure of local mental health facilities. Hundreds or thousands of patients are dumped onto the streets without suitable care or medication.
- An outbreak of a preventable communicable disease (such as measles or hepatitis) occurs. Small-scale quarantines and finger-pointing lead to panic targeted at a marginalized community, increasing emotional tension. Hospitals become overextended, leading to errors in judgment that result in some deaths.
- People riot in the streets after an exciting sports match, sensationalized trial verdict, or tragic murder, or just because they are troublemakers wanting to ruin a celebration. Property is damaged and people are injured or killed. Police and the national guard try to contain the riot, but their presence sparks further violence.

Character Arcs, page 238

Making these and other changes to your city gives you an "out" when placing specific people and businesses in the game. It also helps the players feel a little unsettled by the almost-familiar trappings—they feel at home enough to know the general geography and neighborhoods, but they can still be startled when their favorite restaurant has gone out of business, a popular athlete has been traded to a rival team, or a famous landmark has been vandalized.

DAILY LIFE AS A VAMPIRE

Although the starting adventure thrusts the PCs into working for an absent vampire criminal, some player characters might want to ignore that option and try to go on with their daily lives. Depending on what they did before they became vampires, they might be able to manage that for a while, but the weirdness of being undead takes its toll on other people in a vampire's life. A vampire's lover realizes that their paramour's skin is always cold, and assumes they're ill or no longer interested in them. Family and neighbors notice odd behavior and a change in routine. Bosses and coworkers resent the vampire missing daytime activities. Pets turn hostile or attempt to escape. And there's always the risk that the hunger for blood will turn a friend or loved one into the vampire's next victim. The new vampire's normal daily routine is all but guaranteed to erode, which is why the campaign expects that the PCs will rely on each other and their criminal cohorts.

If you're using character arcs to award experience points, here are some ways

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the players can make use of those arcs to deal with how being a vampire affects the PC's prior life and relationships.

Aid a Friend: The PC helps someone from their old life come to terms with the vampire ending the relationship or friendship. This might require introducing them to a new friend, setting them up for a romantic relationship, or staging a big argument that shows the two of them shouldn't be friends anymore. This arc doesn't preclude the vampire from having any contact with that person—just that the person is no longer a friend and has processed their feelings about it.

Assist an Organization: Similar to the Aid a Friend arc, this allows the vampire to extricate themself from ties to an organization that has been relying on their help. This might be as simple as finding a different person to take over their role, setting aside money to keep the organization stable, or taking some sort of positive action to draw attention to the organization and get it more support from the local population.

Defense: In many cases, a vampire's strongest reason for remaining in contact with their old life is to make sure the people they care about are safe. By thwarting or eliminating one or more significant threats, the vampire can end the relationship knowing that things will be okay. The vampire might arrange for better housing for someone stuck in a bad situation, deal with thugs who have been harassing the family business, or pay off a debt that's keeping someone in danger or poverty.

CAMPAIGN CONSENT TOPICS

Masters of the Night is a horror campaign with villainous vampire protagonists. Before starting the game, you should read Chapter 3: Consent in Horror and think about which topics might be "bad uncomfortable" for you or your players. The basic setup for this campaign assumes that it will include the following topics:

- Blood
- Darkness
- Drugs
- Gore
- Starvation
- Thirst

Depending on what abilities the characters choose and how the campaign plays out, it's likely to involve the following additional topics:

- Body horror
- Harm to animals
- Harm to children
- Physical restraint
- Police, police aggression
- Rats
- Real-world religion

When preparing your players for this campaign, be sure to use the Horror Game Consent Checklist and let them know that at least the first set of topics will be significant parts of the game, giving them the opportunity to discuss their concerns or opt out of it entirely.

Horror Game Consent Checklist, page 222

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Fall From Grace: Sometimes the best way for a vampire to break ties with their former life is to alienate everyone who used to care about them so that when the vampire ends the relationship, the humans are glad they're gone. This requires walking a careful line, as the vampire wants to hurt these people just enough to make them give up on the vampire, but not so much that the actions bring their former friends to harm. Faking an addiction, admitting criminal behavior, and acting extremely disagreeable are common ways to push other people away without causing them too much harm.

Raise a Child: This arc usually involves making sure that the young person has a capable guardian and a suitable environment for growing up. In some parts of the country, this might mean something like sending the child off to boarding school and setting up a trust fund to pay for their needs, but many vampires opt for leaving the child in the care of a relative, funneling money into a bank account, and faking their death so the child doesn't try to track them down. The vampire might check in on them now and then, perhaps with a disguise or through an intermediary.

Redemption: This arc might become relevant if the vampire brought harm to someone in their old life, such as causing them physical injury (especially at full vampire strength), failing to show up for an important event like a wedding or graduation, or being

Are Vampires Science or Supernatural?

In some media, vampires are the result of an ancient curse, a pact with the devil, or a necromantic ritual, and they pass this supernatural affliction (or gift) through a bite or mystical means. In others, they're the result of a mutation, a virus, or genetic engineering, and the medical condition is transmitted to humans by biting. In a few, they're an entirely different species that happens to look much like humans, or dead souls sharing a living person's body due to an extradimensional incursion, and they can't turn other people into vampires at all.

For most campaigns with vampire PCs, the origin and nature of vampirism doesn't matter—vampires operate the same way whether they're the result of a blood curse, possession, a genetic disease, or a contagious virus. Vampires feed on blood, they are tougher than regular humans, they are strangely sensitive to some things that humans can safely ignore, and there could be mystical or scientific explanations for most of those things.

In the Masters of the Night mini-campaign, vampires are supernatural creatures. The players don't need to know this, and they and the PCs may come up with their own theories. (The players and PCs find out later that there *are* other supernatural beings active in the world besides vampires.) The nature of vampirism may become important if the campaign steers toward finding a cure for it (perhaps by investigating a magical ritual or researching a medical solution), but for the most part it's just fodder for player and PC speculation.

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obviously and indirectly responsible for something bad happening to them. This arc might follow a Fall From Grace arc or precede another arc such as Aid a Friend or Defense.

Rescue: This arc is similar to Aid a Friend, but it has a more direct goal and clear outcome in that you know that someone or something has been taken and you need to act to get it or them back. Completing this arc might be sufficient to tie up loose ends with the vampire's old life, or it could lead to another arc like Defense, Raise a Child, or Undo a Wrong.

Undo a Wrong: Like Aid a Friend and Rescue, this arc sets the stage for the vampire to solve a significant problem and then be able to end a relationship without feeling guilty. Of course, the wrong being undone might have been something the vampire PC did in the first place, whether or not the NPC knows the vampire was responsible.

VAMPIRES ARE A SECRET

Vampires are real, but most humans don't know it (something vampires call the Big Secret). Even the humans who worked for the now-missing population of established vampires were largely ignorant of this fact. Only a select few humans knew or know the truth, and most of them are paid very well by vampires to keep them safe from specific threats. Anyone who knows the Big Secret and isn't employed by a vampire in some capacity is likely to end up dead; it's far easier for a vampire to eliminate a potential problem than to risk being blackmailed or exposed.

There's no masquerade, no grand conspiracy to keep vampires a secret or to run human society from behind the scenes—it's just being practical. Smart criminals don't brag about their criminal activity because that's how you get caught. Likewise, vampires usually don't brag that they're vampires because that's how you get caught (and killed). Vampires know that they're vastly outnumbered by humans, they're vulnerable while they sleep, and it's too risky to be out in the open. So they're cautious, they're secretive, and they're quick to fix problems. And when you're a monster who feeds on human blood, fixing a problem usually means hiding a body.

Of course, in the information age, sometimes things slip, and someone who knows too much talks to other people about it, usually through social media. Fortunately for vampires, video and photo editing software, hoaxes, cynicism, and conspiracy theories create an environment where the only people who believe vampires are real are crackpots or disaffected social outcasts, neither of which is any kind of threat. And the moment a person "in the know" pops up in the real world instead of a chatroom, they're a target. People die or disappear under mysterious circumstances every day, and it's common for internet friends who've never met to suddenly drop out of each other's lives.

Big Secret: see vampire slang, page 180

In this book, assume that any human in the setting doesn't know the Big Secret about vampires—if they know, the text will say so.

OTHER SUPERNATURAL SECRETS

So vampires are real, and most humans don't know it. Are there other kinds of supernatural creatures in the world? Most humans don't know that either. The PCs certainly are ignorant of it (because they didn't even know about vampires until they were turned). But it's reasonable for players to think that

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if vampires are real in a world they thought was completely mundane, then ghosts might be real. Witches, werewolves, mutants, and psychics might be real. Demons, zombies, and aliens too. Perhaps all of those strange entities operate in secret, just like the vampires do. Or maybe only vampires are real and everything else is made up. As the GM, it's your call whether you want to bring other categories of supernatural creatures into your campaign, but before you decide, read the adventure "The Hunted."

Chapter 18: Gang War, page 204

Chapter 19: The Hunted, page 215

The Missing Vampires

One of the main questions of the setting is "What happened to all of the older vampires?" The PCs are told very little, and they (and the players) will probably speculate on this question a lot. You should keep them in the dark for as long as possible, as the big reveal should be shocking, and giving them details too early diminishes its impact. The PCs have the opportunity to learn a little more about the older vampires in chapter 18 and will see firsthand what happened in chapter 19.

Following the Emotional Story Arc

In the first adventure, the players are supposed to feel confusion, surprise, and perhaps some guilt or a conflict of conscience as they realize that their characters are vampires and are drawn toward murderous and criminal roles. Later, when they accept their roles as undead and take over the leadership of a criminal gang, they should enjoy the feeling of power that their characters have, in terms of both their vampire abilities and the wealth they can acquire with their criminal activity.

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Most humans are easy prey, and their gifts mean they make easy money. This aspect of the campaign continues as the PCs jockey for position in the city and confront other vampire gangs, using teamwork and their abilities to eliminate threats to their organization.

In the next adventure, they should feel some shock and fear when their main foe is an experienced, more powerful vampire with guards trained to fight lesser vampires. That should temper their confidence as they realize there are still powerful threats in the world, which sets the stage for the eventual conflict with the mysterious force that eliminated the older vampires (revealed in chapter 19). The PCs must either flee for their lives and seek a way to escape or end the threat against them forever.

Common Criminal Activities

The following is a list of common crimes that gangs might be running in your city. Note that some of these are so-called "victimless crimes," so if you want your narrative to have a lighter tone, focus on crimes like bootlegging, gambling, and selling "soft drugs."

- Bootlegging (alcohol, cigarettes)
- Contract killing
- Counterfeiting/pirating
- Credit card fraud
- Drugs (manufacture and sale)
- Economic espionage
- Gambling
- Gun running
- Human trafficking
- Identity theft/fake IDs
- Loan sharking
- Organ trafficking
- Prostitution
- Providing undocumented workers so businesses can dodge taxes
- Robbery, hijacking trucks, and carjacking
- Smuggling

Vampires in Other Time Periods

There's no reason you have to use this setting and adventure material in a realistic modern-day campaign. Here are some ways to include vampire PCs in other genres using the Cypher System.

Fantasy: Vampires are a common antagonist in many fantasy games. The setup for a fantasy campaign with vampire PCs would be very similar to the "ignorant" character creation option, in that the players would create fantasy characters, have some adventures in a fantasy world (either a published setting or something of your own creation), then unexpectedly be turned into undead by a more powerful vampire, who promptly vanishes. In a fantasy urban environment, the campaign would then progress much like in a modern one, with the PCs having connections to criminal and underground elements. If the PCs instead wake up in a frontier castle or remote ruin, they'll be forced to find creative ways to hunt or lure people to them in order to feed, and the campaign may end up more of a "kingmaker" scenario where they try to accumulate power, peasants, and status to cement themselves as rulers of a large geographic area.

Ignorant character creation, page 160

Historical: Using this material in a historical era lets you draw upon all kinds of interesting facts about criminals and infighting in urban centers of the past. Conflicts, the most

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Aversions, page 164

1940s Paris: Inglourious Basterds *(2009 film)*

1930s Chicago: The Untouchables *(1987 film)*

Quirks, page 167

Alternate 1900s London: Dracula *(1897 Bram Stoker novel)*

Victorian characters: The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen *(1999 comic)*

1860s Washington: Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter *(2010 Seth Grahame-Smith novel; 2012 film)*

Animalist, page 150

1850s Manhattan: Gangs of New York *(2002 film). Also look up "Hell-Cat Maggie" and realize that she's probably a vampire.*

You could set the campaign in other eras and nowhere near an urban center, but that would require you to heavily modify the provided adventures, which assume you're playing in a city that has criminal gangs.

Shadow, page 150

valuable goods of the time, and social issues of your chosen historical period create a very different experience than a modern-day setting.

Play in 1940s Paris, with PCs vying for control of the black market and figuring out how many Nazi soldiers they can feed on without drawing too much attention to themselves.

Play in 1930s Chicago during the American prohibition era, with PCs fighting over Al Capone's bootlegging operations after he and the other mobster vampires vanish, with Eliot Ness trying to take them down.

Play in an alternate-timeline 1900s London, a few years after Count Dracula defeats Van Helsing and has populated the city with dozens of vampire minions, all of which have vanished by the time the PCs awaken as undead. Or delve even more deeply into weird historical London by adding other contemporary Victorian characters as NPCs.

Play in 1860s Washington DC during the American Civil War. Different gangs of vampires vie for control over munitions, civilian supplies, and politicians, not just for profit and territory but to affect the outcome of the war itself.

Play in the slums of 1850s Manhattan as battles between street gangs, religious conflicts, and unemployment from an influx of freed slaves escalate tensions to the boiling point.

Post-Apocalyptic: Depending on the source of the worldwide societal collapse, vampires may have incredible survival advantages compared to humans and can leverage their gifts to great effect. Zombies probably don't want to eat vampires, so a

VAMPIRE SLANG

Allergies: Any vampire aversion.

Batfight: Two or more vampires fighting each other.

Big Secret: The knowledge that vampires exist.

Boxer, box baby: A vampire with the coffin-bound quirk.

Chiller: A refrigerator used to store blood. Often a normal household fridge in a hidden place, used for this purpose.

Claim: Calling out to other vampires who you intend to feed on.

Coming in hot: A vampire who has recently fed and is flush with power.

Cruising: Looking for a human to drink from, often by picking them up at a bar or club.

Cujo: A vampire with Animalist bloodline abilities.

Daywalker: A vampire who isn't hurt by sunlight (presumably a rare or even nonexistent creature).

Dirtnapper: A vampire with the soil-bound quirk.

Domino: A bloodmobile.

Dracula (Drac): A vampire who gets *way* too into the look and behavior of being a vampire. The vampire equivalent of a goth.

Fangbanger: A vampire groupie; someone who enjoys being bitten and having their blood taken. May have a sexual aspect. Generally a derogatory term.

Fleb: Short for phlebotomist, in particular one who studies vampire blood.

Foodie: A vampire who seeks out specific individuals to feed on in the interest of intensifying the experience.

Fugly: A vampire with the hideous quirk.

Ghost: A vampire with Shadow bloodline abilities.

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Heisenberg: A chemist who crafts new drugs, perhaps using or influencing vampire blood.

Hypnotist: A vampire with Presence bloodline abilities.

Lead poisoning: To kill a vampire with silver.

Nesting: Protecting the area where a vampire sleeps.

Outing: Revealing someone's vampire nature to another person (vampire or otherwise).

Overseason: To kill a vampire with garlic.

Pet: A human or animal used to guard a vampire, especially one affected by Blood Bind.

Poser/Pose-feratu: A human who pretends or claims to be an actual vampire. They're usually easy prey for real vampires.

Psychic: A vampire with Cognition bloodline abilities.

Ratsucker: A vampire who feeds on the blood of small animals such as rats. It is assumed they leave behind a lot of tiny corpses.

Reeker: A human who stinks of garlic so much that a garlic-averse vampire can't approach them.

Roido: A vampire with the savage quirk.

Send to Florida: To kill a vampire with sunlight, often by chaining them up in an area that will be brightly lit at dawn.

Slop: When a vampire stops feeding on someone and gives them to another vampire to feed on. "I'll slop this one to you since you're hungry." Derived from "sloppy seconds." (As many humans can't survive two feedings in a short amount of time, this is often fatal.)

Sloth: A vampire with the catatonic quirk.

Snacker: A vampire with the starving quirk.

Sunburn: Being hurt by sunlight.

Turf: The territory controlled or claimed by a powerful vampire or gang of vampires.

Vault: A blood bank.

Vegan: A vampire that feeds on milk or plant products instead of human or animal blood. Usually meant as a slur.

Vegetarian: A vampire that feeds on animal blood instead of human blood. Sometimes meant as a slur, sometimes proudly reclaimed by the vampire in question.

Werewolf: A vampire with Morphic bloodline abilities.

Zombie: A vampire with the deathlike quirk.

Presence, page 150

Morphic, page 150

Blood Bind, page 152

Cognition, page 150

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Scarce resources: The Road *(2006 Cormac McCarthy novel; 2009 film)*

Superplague: The Stand *(1978 Stephen King novel)*

Aliens: They Live *(1988 film)*

Dystopia: Nineteen Eighty-Four *(1949 George Orwell novel)*

Blood sports: The Hunger Games *(2008 Suzanne Collins novel; film trilogy)*

Blade *(Marvel comic; 1998 film)*

CROSS

vampire gang leader can scout ahead and use their abilities to protect their human minions. A scarce-resource disaster (such as a famine) doesn't affect vampires as much, nor would a superplague, allowing them to hoard resources for trading with and bribing others. A subtle alien infiltration might give the vampire PCs opportunities to collaborate and sell out humanity (as an extra twist, perhaps the alien technology or magic is the source of the first vampires). This category can include dystopias as well—a government that cares only about power is an ideal target for infiltration by vampires, as is one that uses blood sports to oppress dissent.

Romance: "Vampire romance" is already a genre in fiction, and there's no reason a vampire affiliated with a criminal gang couldn't also interact with a potential love interest or battle relationship problems. In a campaign like this, if the partner is aware and accepting of the PC's vampire nature, the challenges to the relationship might be based on the repercussions of the character's illegal activities.

Science Fiction: Vampires with access to space travel give you a lot of options. Large orbital space stations and subterranean colonies on Mars or the moon mean vampires never have to be out in the sun, and their unusual sleeping patterns probably can go unnoticed. Spacesuits are already designed to resist ultraviolet light, and would help protect a vampire from whatever component of sunlight is harmful to them. Vampire captains of interplanetary vessels could battle for salvage in the dark of night, perhaps establishing territory in different bands of "safe" areas around the sun based on how tolerant they are of sunlight. There may even be some stars that are completely safe for the undead, making their planets havens for vampires.

Superhero: With their blood shifts and bloodline gifts, vampire PCs are right at home in a game setting with superheroes and supervillains. The PCs' new vampire abilities might be their shot at competing for a slice of the city's crime profits (or perhaps only some of the PCs are vampires and the others are supervillains whose powers have different origins). How different crimelords got their exceptional abilities might be an additional reason for them to fight each other, each thinking the source of their abilities is the best for some reason.

GANGS OF THE CITY

It's up to you to divide the territory in your home city and decide which gangs are active in each area. This section presents more than two dozen unique young vampires and groups them into loose gangs based on criminal activities. You can assign these premade gangs to any territory you want in your city, or build your own gangs and interests.

These vampire NPCs are also good for one-off encounters with the PCs or if you need a non-hostile vampire to name-drop in a conversation. Note that they all have street names to make themselves sound tougher, and most of them don't even bother using their old human names anymore.

See the Typical Gang Vampire box for example stats for these vampires.

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TYPICAL GANG VAMPIRE

The vampires running around your city are approximately the same level of power, having been created in the same short span of days before the mightier vampires vanished. You can use the following basic stats for any of these vampires, and choose one or two of the special abilities listed below to make some of them stand out as unique or as a GM intrusion.

Gang Vampire: level 4, climb and stealth as level 5; health 15; damage inflicted 5; aversions (all actions hindered within short range of garlic, religious power, or sunlight, or hindered two steps within immediate range)

Special Abilities:

- *Bat Out of Hell:* Transform into a bat and fly a long distance each round.
- *Brawler:* Melee attacks and Speed defense as level 5.
- *Cloud Memories:* Study a creature for a round, then attack its mind, making it forget the last five minutes.
- *Enthrall:* Hold a creature's attention so it takes no actions (except to defend itself) for as long as the vampire does nothing but speak.
- *Eyes Adjusted:* See in dim light as if it were darkness, and in total darkness as if it were dim light.
- *Healing:* Use an action to recover 5 health once per day.
- *Resilient:* +1 Armor; Might defense as level 5.
- *Slip Into Shadow:* Hide in a nearby shadow even while being observed.
- *War Flesh:* Manifest claws and fangs at will, increasing damage by +1.

EXAMPLE VAMPIRE NPCS

The following are twenty-six individual vampire NPCs that you can use to populate the gangs of your city. Each has a street name, physical description, typical outfit, personality summary, and suggested gang affiliation (short descriptions of gangs are in the next section of this chapter). Many of these vampires are illustrated throughout part 2 of this book.

Ace: Woman, age 28, short with an average build, wears expensive workout clothes, thyroidectomy scar on her neck, cold personality. Member of the Cult.

Brick: Man, age 32, average height with a very strong build, wears weathered gym clothes, buzz cut, a bully. Member of the VPs.

Cross: Man, age 21, tall and broad but thin, dresses like a priest, has a gold tooth and wears a gold necklace, stern and unforgiving. Member of the Cult.

Dagger: Woman, age 18, thin and wiry build, wears dark utilitarian clothes, short curly hair, nervous. Member of the Sewer Rats.

Endgame: Androgynous, age 24, tall and thin, wears rave clothes, has metallic ear gauges, hedonistic and insightful. Member of the Shadow Mob.

Fireball: Woman, age 27, somewhat burly, wears camouflage clothing, red hair, gregarious and funny. Member of the Red Devils.

Goblin: Man, age 26, nondescript build, dresses like a slob, teeth filed into points, has other body modifications, twitchy and aggressive. Member of the Sewer Rats.

Hatred: Woman, age 19, average build, wears sexy red and black clothing, long manicured fingernails, piercing blue eyes, frequently uses sarcasm and double entendres. Member of the Red Devils.

FIREBALL

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A short list of additional vampire names if you need more:

Artery
Butcher
Cyanide
Domino
English
Fatal
Grunge
Hunger
Indigo
Jersey
Kneecap
Legalize
Magnetic
Nine Iron
Octagon
Package
Quarters
Rockstar
Suckerpunch
Thumbs
Updog
Vice
Warlock
Xeno
Yesterday
Zero

Icon: Woman, age 24, tall and thin, wears stylish casual clothing, very good posture, quiet but intense. Member of the VPs.

Jumpcat: Androgynous, age 20, big but strong (like a weightlifter or wrestler rather than a bodybuilder), wears comfortable athletic clothing, blue hair, doesn't respect personal space. Member of the Shadow Mob.

Kegger: Androgynous, age 22, soft average build, wears sports team merchandise, Chinese tattoo on bicep, boastful and daring. Member of the Bloodhounds.

Lightning: Man, age 30, average athletic build (like a cyclist or runner), wears cyclist racing clothes, old cigarette burns on his forearm, brooding, prone to making casual insults. Member of the Bloodhounds.

MOTHER

Mother: Woman, age 24, thin and almost gaunt, wears conservative stylish clothing, simple short ponytail and a widow's peak, short-tempered and entitled. Member of the VPs.

Necro: Woman, age 25, average build and short, wears goth clothing, skull and ankh tattoos on her arms, trying too hard to be edgy and spooky. Member of the Cult.

Origami: Woman, age 33, average height and curvy, wears jeans and a grease-stained t-shirt, dirty fingernails, hair tied up in a bandana, quiet but observant. Member of the Shadow Mob.

Prophet: Man, age 28, short and a little too thin, wears nice suits that aren't well cared for, mumbles a lot, talks to himself under his breath, alternatingly nervous and belligerent. Member of the Cult.

Quitter: Man, age 18, average height, looks more agile than strong, dresses like a skate punk, scruffy beard, frequently checks behind him, repeats little dancing or skateboarding motions. Member of the Bloodhounds.

Redwood: Man, age 22, big and tall, wears nice clothes that are a little too small for him, scar on his head that interrupts his hairline, a mix of awkward and intimidating. Member of the VPs.

Snake: Woman, age 22, short and curvy, dresses like a college student, thick black glasses that may be a prop, confident and protective. Member of the Bloodhounds.

Trenchcoat: Man, age 26, average height and a little paunchy, wears a shirt with comic book characters on it, strong cheekbones and a patchy beard, very articulate and sociable. Member of the Red Devils.

Unholy: Man, age 27, scrawny, wears casually edgy clothes (jeans, t-shirt,

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and a trench coat), has a lot of old acne scars on his face, looks and acts like a meth head. Member of the Sewer Rats.

Virus: Woman, age 32, tall and strong (like a bodybuilder), wears gym clothes, blunt and critical. Member of the Red Devils.

Werewolf: Man, age 18, average build, dresses like a rural country boy (jeans, boots, and a white tank top), wild hair and an overgrown beard, acts like he'd rather be hunting rabbits or off-roading. Member of the Red Devils.

X: Woman, age 26, out of shape, wears casual hippie clothing, sad eyes, frequent smoker, tends to agree with whoever is most assertive. Member of the Shadow Mob.

Yeet: Woman, age 28, thin, wears an excessive amount of leather, has a lot of video game tattoos, snide and prone to laughing at others' expense. Member of the Bloodhounds.

Zodiac: Man, age 22, short and thin, wears biker leathers, missing his left pinkie finger, loves bragging and carousing. Member of the Sewer Rats.

EXAMPLE VAMPIRE GANGS

The following are small vampire gangs you can use in other territories in your city. Each has a name, a suggestion for what sort of territory it controls, a bit about its personalities and goals, its criminal interests, the symbol it uses to mark its territory, and likely members drawn from the example vampire list. Feel free to change any or all of these details for your campaign, especially to suit the mood or consent issues.

THE BLOODHOUNDS

This gang consists mostly of younger vampires, perhaps from a neighborhood populated by college students and twentysomethings. They're mostly interested in partying and avoiding real work, which limits their influence, territory, and activities.

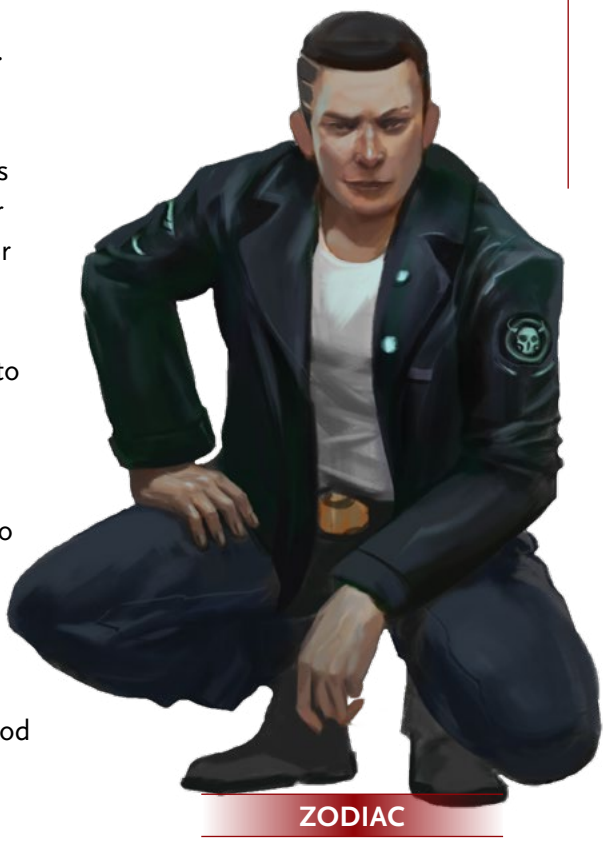
Criminal interests: Fake IDs, bootlegging (usually selling age-restricted items such as cigarettes and alcohol), soft drugs, piracy (movies, books, software)

Symbol: A stylized red dog or the word "HOUNDS"

Example members: Kegger, Lightning, Quitter, Snake, Yeet

THE CULT

This gang leans hard on the spooky or goth aspects of being a vampire, and it probably controls a territory in a business or mercantile part of the city. They see themselves as elites ruling over disposable humans (which they regard as little better than food), are in this to make money and live like royalty, and are aggressive about dealing with threats to their organization.



ZODIAC

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Criminal interests: Gun running, loan sharking, organ trafficking, providing undocumented workers

Symbol: An ankh, an eye with a teardrop, or the word "CULT"

Example members: Ace, Cross, Necro, Prophet

THE RED DEVILS

This group is a rough-and-tumble gang of outcasts, rebels, and weirdos. They're content to live off the weakest people on the fringes of human society, and they probably control a territory on the edge of town that overlaps with rural or natural areas. Most of them are good at hiding and sneaking, and finding them for an alliance or confrontation will be difficult.

Chapter 18: Gang War, page 204

Criminal interests: Bootlegging, gun running, robbery, smuggling

Symbol: A horned human head, a "D" with horns, or the word "DEVILS"

Example members: Fireball, Hatred, Trenchcoat, Virus, Werewolf

THE SEWER RATS

The closest thing the city has to a biker gang, now with vampire powers. Controls an unsafe slum territory. They're very dangerous people who don't get along particularly well, but they stick together because they know they're stronger as a group against other gangs. Prone to unprovoked aggression against neighboring territories.

Criminal interests: Contract killing, credit card fraud, drugs, gun running, prostitution, robbery, hijacking/carjacking

Symbol: A blue or green rat, or the word "RATS" underlined in blue

Example members: Dagger, Goblin, Unholy, Zodiac

THE SHADOW MOB

A hodgepodge of people who happened to be in the same general area when their creator vampire went looking for new minions. They probably control a small territory that has visitors from all parts of town, such as an area with a mall or popular tourist attraction. They have almost nothing in common with each other, and they're the gang most likely to implode, split up (with individual members aiming to join other gangs, if possible), or fall under the sway of a more powerful person in the city (such as Mr. Arch from the "Gang War" adventure). Initially they try to play it quiet and keep safely within their own territory at all times.

Criminal interests: Drugs, loan sharking, smuggling

Symbol: A black silhouette, or the word "MOB" in a square

Example members: Endgame, Jumpcat, Origami, X

THE VPs

These vampires were heirs of privilege when they were alive, born into wealthy or politically influential families. It's likely that they control a territory full of rich people, fancy houses, and golf courses. Now they hunger for the spotlight and the power to influence the human world, while recognizing that they can't draw too much attention to themselves. The fact that "low-born" vampires control parts of their city infuriates them.

Criminal interests: Economic espionage, gambling, human trafficking, prostitution, smuggling

Symbol: The word "VP" surrounded by a gold circle

Example members: Brick, Icon, Mother, Redwood

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"Your Last Sunrise" is a mystery horror adventure where the PCs are turned into vampires, have to deal with a threat against their lives, and must find a safe house before dawn. During this adventure they'll have the opportunity to test their new vampire abilities, get a sense of how powerful they are, and feed on human blood.

BACKGROUND

The setting for this adventure is your home city, in a world very much like our own, except vampires exist, and most people (including the PCs) think they're just fiction. The PCs wake up in a storage room with a letter informing them that not only are vampires real, *they* have been made into vampires, and some people nearby want to kill them.

SYNOPSIS

An established vampire known as Mr. Shark became aware of something powerful tracking down and killing all the vampires in the city. Seeking to escape this fate, but not wanting his criminal enterprises to fall apart while he was hiding, he grabbed a few suitable candidates (the PCs), began the process of turning them into vampires, and hid them in a basement storage room of one of his properties. He believed that whatever was hunting vampires wouldn't find his new protégés, and his new minions would have the power to protect his assets while he was away.

Mr. Shark also knew that the PCs would be hungry for blood when they first awoke and might be uncertain of their new abilities. To push them into a bloody conflict, he hired some street thugs to stand guard outside the room where the new vampires were sleeping. He told the thugs that the "junkies" inside the room (the PCs) had stolen a bag of money from him and locked themselves in, but were high on PCP and too dangerous to confront until that wore off. The thugs were told to wait until the drugs wore off and the "junkies" came out of the room, at which point the thugs should kill them and recover the money. He also provided each thug with a revolver (with the serial numbers filed off) and ammunition.

Unfortunately for the gullible criminals, Mr. Shark has no intention of letting the new vampires be harmed; this is all a setup to give them the opportunity to feed. The bullets he provided are blanks. His plan is for the thugs to open fire on the "junkies" with their useless pistols, and for the vampires to kill and feed upon the thugs.

Meanwhile, Mr. Shark has fled the city, leaving instructions and dossiers on the PCs with his personal assistant, Emily, who will be waiting for them

This chapter is intended for GMs only.

Chapter 15: Your City at Night, page 173

PCP (phencyclidine), also known as angel dust, is a dangerous drug that can cause euphoria, hallucinations, desensitization to pain, psychosis, and aggressive behavior.

This adventure assumes that Mr. Shark is in the business of researching, creating, testing, and distributing new street drugs such as ecstasy, ketamine, and crystal meth. If your city's crime is focused on other things, adjust this business accordingly.

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at the boss's guest house. Emily can provide the PCs with more information about the criminal business they need to take care of, but she doesn't know that vampires exist. Safe for now from immediate threats and the encroaching sunlight, the PCs can take some time to rest and discuss what to do next.

GETTING THE PCs INVOLVED

This adventure begins with the PCs having already been abducted and knocked out, so there is essentially no additional preparation other than establishing how they know each other (if at all). Optionally, you could create a roleplaying encounter for the PCs (singly or in groups) to give them time to verbally establish their connections before jumping into the adventure.

1. THE STORAGE ROOM

READ ALOUD

You wake up in a small room with a concrete floor, walls, and ceiling. A small 40-watt bulb hangs from the ceiling, casting a weak yellow light over everything. There are no windows. A sturdy-looking door is held shut with a simple metal padlock. A large manila envelope is on the floor near the door.

Aversions, page 164

If you've already determined aversions for the PCs, keep those in mind as the characters examine their surroundings, but don't reveal them to the players until an aversion directly affects them. For example, if any of them have an aversion to mirrors, looking at themselves using a mobile phone camera is enough to trigger that aversion.

TEXT OF THE LETTER

Greetings,

You are now vampires. I created you. Congratulations, you have seen your last sunrise.

I have to be away for a time. You will look after the dangerous aspects of my business while I am away. If you don't, when I return I'll have to kill you and replace you with smarter employees.

Use the keycard to get into my guest house. My personal assistant, Emily, will explain.

The people just outside the room want to kill you. Don't let them.

—Mr. Shark

[under the signature is an address in a nice part of town]

There is a group of armed thugs on the other side of the door, and if the PCs make too much noise (anything more than low talking), the thugs will hear them and be ready.

The players are likely to have a lot of questions at this point. Here is some information about relevant topics.

Are vampires real? As far as the PCs know, vampires are fictional. However, each PC has blood crusted on one side of their neck, but no wounds to show for it. If they experiment a bit, they may be able to tell that they feel stronger or faster than they remember (depending on how the players assigned blood shifts for their characters).

Do we feel like we're vampires? Each PC does feel a little strange, like a combination of a slight hangover and pleasant intoxication—perhaps from alcohol, coffee, or another drug. (If you've decided to let the players assign

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their blood shifts dynamically instead of in advance, now is the time to explain how blood shifts work and give them the Vampire Abilities Reference Sheet.)

Door: The interior door is sturdy, tough enough that a typical person would need an axe or crowbar to get through it. It has a simple doorknob. The door hinges are on the same side as the PCs and it's locked with a standard steel padlock. The door isn't quite flush with the floor (the envelope could fit under it), and someone trying to look under it can barely see that there's a large area on the other side, with some tables or chairs (or at least their legs). Anyone trying to listen through the door can hear people talking, unless the PCs have made enough noise to alert the thugs, in which case they're quiet and waiting for the "junkies" to open the door.

Envelope: A standard manila envelope held closed with a cardboard button and string. It contains a handwritten letter, a keycard, and a small metal key.

How did we get here? The last thing the PCs remember is being out at night and something hurting their neck. Whether any of them were together at the time depends on their connections to each other and whether it's reasonable that they may not have been alone.

Key: A simple metal key. If tried on the padlock, it works.

Keycard: A plastic RFID keycard like those used in hotels or gated communities. It doesn't have an address or any identifying marks on it other than the manufacturer's logo ("ARPT Security, Inc.").

Letter: The letter is handwritten on plain white paper (see Text of the Letter on page 188). The handwriting is a little hard to read—perhaps because it's sloppy cursive, or perhaps because it was written quickly.

Light: An old, yellowing incandescent bulb. The light switch for it is near the door.

Mr. Shark: If any of the PCs have criminal connections or are reasonably aware of local crime news, they've at least heard of an (alleged) drug lord who goes by the name of "Shark." Depending on the PCs' involvement with local crime, they may have indirectly worked for him or even met him briefly. He's middle-aged, medium height, and multiethnic (hard to pin down exactly what), with grey hair, and he dresses well. If they ask whether they've seen him during the day (even in photos), they don't remember ever seeing him except at night.

Room: Unremarkable, square, about 20 feet (6 m) across (a short distance), with no furnishings. Dust and stains along the walls and floor suggest that it once had shelves and stacked boxes. There are no windows and no other ways out except the door.

Where's our stuff? The PCs are carrying anything they reasonably would have been carrying with them when they were abducted. This includes mobile phones, although they get no reception in this room. (The time and date on their phones and watches indicate that it is about 2 a.m., and three days have passed since their last memories).

Overall, it seems that the PCs were abducted, turned into vampires, and locked in this room (from the inside, based on the padlock on the inside of the door). This could be an elaborate prank or a weird kidnapping scheme, but it seems that the PCs actually are

Dynamic or Static Blood Shift Selection, page 160

Vampire Abilities Reference Sheet, page 223

Door: *level 6*

Padlock: *level 6*

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vampires. The characters have no way of knowing this yet, but the letter from Mr. Shark is truthful.

When the PCs decide to open the door, proceed to the next section.

THUG LIFE

Waiting in this room are several thugs hired by Mr. Shark under the premise of helping him deal with a problem. They aren't part of his organization and aren't competent enough to be worth saving, so he's setting them up for failure here against the PCs. All of them are criminals (mostly for petty crimes like burglary, but a couple of them have performed robberies or punitive beatings before). They all know *of* Mr. Shark (and that he is some kind of crime boss) but have never worked for him before.

JIMMY THE SCAB

For the purpose of this adventure, a blank cartridge inflicts 1 point of damage if it hits at immediate range, and no damage at any other range.

The thugs were briefed outside the building a couple of days ago by someone named Claire, an agent of Mr. Shark. She told them that the people inside the locked room (the PCs) are junkies high on PCP who stole a large bag of money from Mr. Shark and then hid out in the basement. The PCP makes them very dangerous, so Claire said to wait until they sobered up on their own (which should be sometime today), at which point they'd be easy pickings. She gave the thugs permission to kill the junkies and instructions to bring the bag of money to a drop box. She also gave each of them a fully loaded untraceable revolver, which they're supposed to dispose of after reclaiming the cash.

Unfortunately, basically nothing the thugs have been told is true. They're not facing junkies, but hungry vampires. The PCs don't have any of Mr. Shark's money. And the bullets in their revolvers are blanks. They've been set up to provoke a fight with the PCs and are going to lose.

The area outside the PCs' room is lit by three weak bulbs. The room is about 20 feet (6 m) across (a short distance) and extends about 60 feet (18 m) away from the door (a long distance). At the far end is a hallway that leads off to the left, with a red EXIT sign at the corner. There are no windows here, and

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the smell and feel of the area suggests that it's a large basement, perhaps to a warehouse or factory.

This was set up to be an easy job; there are places to sit, and the thugs had food delivered to the exterior door (upstairs), so there's a collection of containers and plates on one of the tables, including a large pizza with garlic bread, several kinds of Chinese food, and fried chicken. Despite the relative comforts, the doomed thugs have been waiting for almost twelve hours and are growing impatient. Unless the PCs are deliberately very quiet, the thugs eventually hear them moving around and either fall silent so the "junkies" will think it's safe to come out, or start pounding on the door demanding that they come out with the stolen bag of money.

The waiting thugs are as follows.

Billie: A feral-looking androgynous person with a bleached-blond perm, wearing a jacket made out of patches.

Jimmy the Scab: A scruffy, dark-haired man with a patchy beard and a lot of scabs on his face.

Prez: A tall, broad-shouldered man wearing a tattered sport coat over a shirt and jeans.

River: A long-faced man with tawny "big 80s hair" and wearing a lot of cheap jewelry.

Trashcan: A scruffy man with spiky hair, wearing a leather jacket. Self-appointed leader of this group.

Yager: A woman with a haunted look and wild, curly black hair, wearing a white shirt and jeans.

When the PCs open the door, read the following description.

READ ALOUD

This room is the same width as the one you woke up in, and similarly dank, but about three times longer. Furnishings include a few simple metal chairs, a long table with fast food containers on it, and some large, empty wire shelving units. Several dangerous and dirty-looking people are armed with pistols and positioned in various places around the room.

Assuming that the NPCs know the PCs are awake, all of the thugs have their revolvers drawn (an observant PC, particularly one familiar with firearms, might notice that they're all the same type of handgun). Once the door is open, one of the thugs (probably Trashcan) yells "Come out and hand over the bag of money or you're gonna get shot!"

This will quickly turn into a fight, as the thugs want to do good by Mr. Shark and specifically have been told that it's okay to kill the PCs. If nobody comes out, the thugs yell a warning again and start firing through the doorway if nobody complies. If one of the PCs comes out and doesn't obviously have a bag of money, the thugs are likely to get angry and shoot at that PC to send a message that they're serious.

If any of the vampires has a garlic aversion and enters the room with the thugs, the garlic bread and garlic on the pizza is enough to trigger the aversion. (The starting room is a safe enough distance from the garlic that it can't be felt or even smelled.) Closing the boxes with those items prevents them from affecting vampires with that aversion.

The thugs don't know the PCs are vampires, but if the PCs have any aversion reactions, the thugs assume

Why provide names and descriptions of thugs who are quickly going to die at the hands of the PCs? The information humanizes these opponents so they're not just generic villains. When the PCs kill and perhaps feed upon them, it'll make their deaths more real, and make the PCs more monstrous for doing so.

GM intrusion: *The thugs have propped a chair against the door at such an angle that it can't be seen by PCs looking under the door. When the door is opened, the chair falls, making noise and creating an obstacle (level 2) that slows or hinders anyone trying to move or attack through the doorway.*

Garlic aversion, page 166

GM intrusion: *Someone bumps against the table with the takeout cartons, knocking over a Chinese food container and spilling rice across the floor. This affects any nearby vampire with arithmomania. Covering up the rice ends the compulsion. Arithmomania, page 165.*

GM intrusion: *One of the thugs wears a religious symbol around their neck, which comes into view during the fight and triggers nearby vampires' aversions. Religious aversion, page 166.*

Thug (6): *level 3; health 9; 1 point of damage from pistols firing blanks at immediate range, or 3 points of damage from knives*

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GM intrusion: *The smell of blood from a wounded thug triggers a hunger reaction in a PC, who must make a level 3 Intellect defense roll or use their next action feeding on that thug.*

GM intrusion: *One of the thugs draws their own pistol, declares "This one doesn't have blanks!" and shoots at a PC with live ammunition, inflicting 4 points of damage with a successful attack.*

Damn, it's harsh to dismiss the thugs as "lowlifes." These are people we're talking about. And the PCs are just going to use them as food.

Locked door: *level 7*

it's because the "junkies" are having a weird reaction to the PCP they supposedly took. Likewise, any weird vampire behavior (including biting or extraordinary strength) is assumed to be drug-based (but can still be quite intimidating).

If the PCs manage to dodge "bullets" for a round or two, the thugs assume that the junkies are really damn fast. The thugs won't realize they're firing blanks until at least one or two of their shots that should be solid hits (failed PC defense rolls) inflict little or no damage. At this point, some of the thugs start to realize that either they've been set up or this is some weird test by Mr. Shark, and they draw knives and continue fighting.

CLAIRE

If three or more of the thugs are downed, the rest of them try to run away out the side hallway at the far end of the room. If captured and questioned, they can only repeat the information they were told, give a description of Claire (a medium-height, serious-looking woman about fifty years old with dark blonde hair), and reveal the location of the drop box (somewhere else in the city).

All of the thugs are lowlifes that the world wouldn't miss if they were dead, so if the PCs decide to kill them (whether out of spite, to keep their vampire existence a secret, or for any other reason), that murder probably could be justified as self-defense in this shades-of-grey world.

UPSTAIRS AND OUT

Taking the side hall at the far end of the large room leads to a set of stairs going up. On the floor upstairs, mobile phones have reception. On that level is another hallway with three doors—a unisex bathroom, a heavy locked door with a mesh-reinforced window at eye level, and an exit door with a crash bar.

The area beyond the locked door is a large warehouse space filled with shelves and boxes, all lit by dim bulbs. The boxes are stenciled with the names of various companies that manufacture laboratory equipment (beakers, Erlenmeyer flasks, and so on), and the boxes contain those items, all packed safely for shipping—apparently this place is a warehouse or distribution center for labs or something similar. On the far end is a locked exterior door and a closed and locked loading dock for small trucks.

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The exit door leads outside to an alley with a few parking spaces. Unless the PCs spent several hours inside after waking up, it is still the middle of the night. If any of the PCs has a car, it's parked here. The characters are free, but apparently the only place to get more information about their new condition is at the address on Mr. Shark's note.

If the PCs go to the address on the note, proceed to the next section of this adventure. If not, let them wander around as they like, but starting the next morning, they begin receiving text messages from someone named Emily telling them that they were supposed to have come to Mr. Shark's guest house by now to attend to important business matters. (Long term, the PCs can avoid going there and pursue their own plans, but without the income and other resources they'd get from working for Mr. Shark, they'll be vulnerable to attacks from other vampire gangs.)

SHARK'S GUEST HOUSE

The home at the address on the note is in a nice part of town and looks like something an upper-middle class person might live in—comfortable, but not too luxurious. If the PCs arrive at night, the lights are on inside, as is the light above the entrance, but the windows are blurry (perhaps because of a film or screen). The entrance has a keycard reader, an intercom, and a window peephole.

Currently there are two people inside the house: Claire and Emily. Claire is a medium-height, serious-looking woman about fifty years old with dark blonde hair, and she wears a pistol in a holster. She handles security for various properties owned by Mr. Shark and is currently assigned here to make sure Emily and the guest house are safe and secure when the PCs arrive.

Emily is a woman about thirty years old with black hair. She strongly resembles a famous actress from the 1990s and wears business casual clothing. She usually accompanies her spoken words with sign language (if asked about this, she explains that her husband is hearing impaired and she likes to practice). Emily is Mr. Shark's personal assistant.

Depending on your city, Mr. Shark's guest house might be a home, a condominium, a small mansion, or a large suite in a residential building. Adjust the details of this encounter to suit your city.

Claire: *level 3, pistols as level 4*

Emily: *level 2, running a business as level 4*

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Through the business, Emily can get almost any inexpensive or moderately priced item for the PCs, plus firearms in the expensive category. Each PC's weekly pay depends on the cost of living in your city, but should be enough to live at a comfortable but not extravagant level. PCs who abuse the generosity of the business will have their pay cut to account for big expenses.

Emily and Claire don't know where Mr. Shark is or when he'll be back. They know where his main house is, but they have instructions not to reveal that to the PCs or anyone else.

The newly made vampires can still eat human food, but they need to drink blood to survive. Eating human food, page 163.

Bloodline abilities, page 149

Quirks, page 167

Both Claire and Emily are aware of Mr. Shark's business operations (and know that his business is not legal), and they are very tactful about referring to the business—deliveries, problems in production, disputes with competitors, and so on—without saying anything that could be considered a legal admission of guilt. Neither of them are vampires and neither knows that vampires are real. They believe that Mr. Shark has a rare skin condition that makes him very sensitive to sunlight, so he sleeps during the day, works at night, and never goes outside while it's light out. Both Claire and Emily have seen the dossiers prepared about the PCs and will recognize the characters if they show up.

If the PCs knock or use the intercom, Claire replies through the intercom, asking what they want. If the PCs identify themselves (or aren't trying to hide their faces so she can see them through the peephole), she buzzes them in, allows them to enter the foyer of the guest house, introduces herself, and asks them to wait while she gets Emily. If the PCs use their keycard to enter the guest house, Claire is ready for them, calls them by name, and asks them to wait in the foyer while she goes to get Emily.

Emily is very pleasant and speaks to the PCs kindly, addressing them by name. She explains that Mr. Shark had to leave town for an emergency and needed some talented people to look after some aspects of his business—particularly security—while he's gone. The PCs will be paid weekly in cash, will get their assignments from Emily (usually by text), and will be able to stay in the guest house (which she insists is very secure) as long as they remain in Mr. Shark's employ. She says that he provided her with a dossier on each PC, and will hand them over if asked; the dossier includes a few photos and information that could be found by searching the internet, social media, and police records. There are no business issues that need to be addressed right now, so if the PCs want to claim rooms in the guest house, they are free to do so (there is a keycard set aside for each PC). Emily is available if they have any questions or need specific equipment.

This Claire is the same person who set up the thugs. She doesn't show remorse about them or provide additional details, simply stating "These things sometimes happen in our line of work. But don't worry—you are too valuable to Mr. Shark to have to worry about something like that happening."

Ending the Adventure

Safe from immediate threats and the approaching dawn (the special windows block out the harmful effects of sunlight), the PCs can take some time to get used to their current situation, plan their next meal, and wait for their first assignments. Emily and Claire work on Mr. Shark's schedule and will leave the house shortly after dawn. Each gives the PCs their mobile number, and they expect the PCs' contact info in return.

If you want to offer each PC a free bloodline ability in exchange for an unspecified quirk, now would be a good time to do so. The ability and quirk should manifest over the next day or so.

XP Awards: The PCs each earn 1 XP for navigating the weirdness of their new vampire abilities, and an additional 1 XP for getting to Mr. Shark's guest house and learning about their new jobs from Emily.

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"Power Vacuum" is a mystery horror adventure where the PCs deal with a montage of events relating to operating an illegal business.

BACKGROUND

Now that the vampire PCs have a safe place to stay and contacts in Mr. Shark's criminal organization, they can get to work at doing their job and making sure the money keeps rolling in. This adventure can immediately follow "Your Last Sunrise," or you can run it after giving the PCs some time to wrap up things in their former (living) existence, select character arcs, and so on.

Before running this adventure, look at a map of your city and divide it into at least three territories under the control of different gangs, with the PCs starting in the territory where Mr. Shark's guest house is. If possible, use obvious features like highways, major streets, and bodies of water to define the borders of these territories so it's easy for the PCs (and NPC criminals) to know if they're operating in their own territory or on the turf of a rival gang. These borders will become more important in later adventures, and for now they're only significant in that Claire lets the PCs know the extent of Mr. Shark's turf.

SYNOPSIS

Claire and Emily handle much of Mr. Shark's business, but he needs the PCs to take an active role in protecting some of the more dangerous aspects of the organization. The PCs will get their hands dirty protecting shipments and payments, searching for clues about the whereabouts of older vampires, dealing with an attempt to defraud them, and getting to know their territory in the city.

Each of the encounters in this adventure should take place several days apart, giving the PCs time to relax, do research (perhaps about what happened to the other vampires), get into trouble, and slake their undead thirst. There are also several side events about other happenings in the city that the PCs hear about, either in the news or from other people in the organization.

Other than the first encounter, the events can take place in any order, and you should adjust when they happen based on the PCs' other activities. For example, if they decide to steal a bloodmobile, the report of a different bloodmobile theft (or a blood bank being burglarized) should occur after that, as other vampires unknown to the PCs realize that stealing blood is an easy way to get food without drawing the kind of attention that a bunch of drained bodies does. If the PCs don't

This chapter is intended for GMs only.

Claire: *level 3, pistols as level 4*

Emily: *level 2, running a business as level 4*

Chapter 16: Your Last Sunrise, page 187

Daily Life as a Vampire, page 174

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think of stealing blood, they can hear the story of a bloodmobile theft or hospital break-in, which might inspire them to perpetrate a similar crime.

You can also intersperse these encounters among other things the PCs do on their own (such as pursue character arcs), weaving these events into the PC-driven parts of the story.

It's important to note that in this group of encounters, the PCs never run into any other vampires or hear that other vampires are active in the city. As far as they know, they're the only ones who are still around—and that should make them feel especially confident about doing the tasks presented here.

GETTING THE PCs INVOLVED

Emily and Claire will contact the PCs by phone call or text when it's time to do the first job. The PCs should feel obligated to respond and show up where they're told. After all, they are living for free in the guest house, and Mr. Shark did say he'd kill them if they failed to do the work . . .

RANDI'S LABORATORY

Claire contacts the PCs and tells them to meet her (in the late evening, after sundown) so they can see how the research and manufacturing aspect of the business works. She gives them an address (inside Mr. Shark's territory) to a small building in a business park. The two-story building has an unremarkable sign with a company name ("SVEMNO Pharmaceuticals") and a security door with an intercom.

Claire is waiting for them outside and has the entire group buzzed in. She shows them the first-floor offices and (through a glass window to prevent contamination) the laboratory space where the company ostensibly researches drugs for treating depression and anxiety, but is actually developing new recreational drugs to sell on the streets. Lead scientist Randi and her three other researchers use the first-floor lab to develop the drugs (which are smuggled out to animal testing labs and human volunteers in nearby cities) and use the second-floor lab to manufacture two or three different street drugs. As part of this introduction and tour, Claire explains that the PCs will sometimes pick up product from the lab or bring in supplies, and in general they'll handle security emergencies when she is unavailable.

Randi is a very short, calm woman with brown hair, and usually wears a

NO THANK YOU, CRIME!

The PCs can refuse to get involved in Mr. Shark's criminal business. If they do, Claire and Emily have instructions to evict them from the guest house, calling the police if necessary (using corrupt cops on Mr. Shark's payroll), in a raid just before dawn, which puts pressure on the PCs to find a safe place to sleep as soon as possible. If the PCs avoid going to the guest house and don't answer calls or texts, Claire pays people to track them down through their phone service, the internet, or other people in their lives. She doesn't threaten or harm the PCs or anyone they know, but she makes it obvious that her people can find the characters if necessary, which will make things complicated when Mr. Shark returns.

Randi: *level 2, biochemistry as level 4*

Researcher: *level 2, biochemistry as level 3*

The drugs made in Randi's lab depend on what's popular in your city—it might be crystal meth, ecstasy, ketamine, LSD, PCP, and so on.

A PC with science skills might want to get involved with the research happening at the lab, at least some of the time.

GM intrusion: *One of the PCs has an awkward past with Randi or one of the researchers, such as a bad blind date or a minor car collision.*

For a later short encounter at this location, Claire sends the PCs to talk to Randi about a break-in at the lab—perhaps someone looking for drugs or corporate secrets.

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lab coat over normal clothes. She is nice to talk to and a little sarcastic, and she's used to Mr. Shark, Emily, or Claire bringing important people to the lab to see where the magic happens. If any PCs are trained in an appropriate science, she's happy to fill in extra details about their work, but otherwise sticks to a short summary appropriate for a layperson. She and her team are young, enthusiastic, well paid, and likely to work late hours and sleep in every morning.

While at the lab, Randi gives Claire a thick padded envelope. If the PCs ask (but only if they ask), she says that they're product samples she is taking out of town, and at some point she'll need the PCs to make a delivery like that (which could be a short encounter in the future), but right now it's nothing they need to worry about.

HANDLING PAYROLL

Emily contacts the PCs on a specific day of the week and tells them she needs them to make some "payroll" deliveries—cash payments to individuals and businesses who do work for Mr. Shark. She arranges a time for her to stop by the guest house and drop off a box full of envelopes stuffed with wrapped bundles of $5, $10, or $20 bills (one hundred bills per bundle).

Each envelope has a code on it consisting of two letters and two numbers. Emily explains that the codes are the first two letters of the recipient's name, the number of letters in the recipient's name, and what approximate hour in the night they should be met (so Marko, who gets paid at midnight, becomes MA5-12). The codes make it easy to know which envelope goes to each person, but still offers a layer of protection for the courier and the recipient. Emily shows the PCs photos of the recipients on her phone so they'll recognize them and tells the PCs where

RANDI

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to meet each person. The names, codes, personal descriptions, and exchange locations are as follows:

- **Bullet (BU6-11):** Tall dark-haired woman in her 20s, missing a front tooth. Gas station.
- **Kel (KE3-7):** Short auburn-haired woman with large blue eyes, usually smoking a cigarette. Big box superstore.
- **Marko (MA5-12):** Built like a mixed martial artist, gold dental grill, cauliflower ears. Strip club.
- **Ribs (RI4-10):** A very thin man who dresses like a bodybuilder, age 30, star tattoos on his hands. Gun store.
- **Seef (SE4-9):** An average-looking man, about age 30, with large teeth and nerdy black glasses. Popular family restaurant.
- **Turk (TU4-8):** A police officer, about 40 years old, medium height, red hair. Coffee shop.

Payroll recipients: *level 2 or 3*

GM intrusion: *Someone or something interrupts a handoff, perhaps because someone recognizes a PC or the recipient and wants to chat, a bystander taking a selfie gets in the way, or an unexpected event occurs (like an emergency vehicle or fire alarm).*

GM intrusion: *Before or immediately after a payroll handoff, a local tough decides to rob a PC in front of witnesses who shouldn't see vampire abilities in action.*

The delivery times and locations are arranged so it's easy to do them in chronological order without a lot of excess driving or waiting around. Emily expects the PCs to handle this with subtlety, but she adds that the contacts should recognize the envelope (or at least new couriers lingering in the area) and make themselves noticed to the characters, perhaps making a vague comment about fish or sharks to indicate they're the one the PCs are looking for.

If there are any problems or suspicious activity, the PCs should skip the drop, leave the area, and let Emily know about it as soon as possible (she can always reschedule a delivery for the next day). If necessary, they should ditch the cash as well. Once the PCs handle the payroll to her satisfaction, she makes this part of their weekly routine.

Drug dealers: *level 2; persuasion, sleight of hand, running, and Speed defense as level 3*

Unlike all other people the PCs have met in the organization, most of the dealers call the boss "Shark" instead of "Mr. Shark."

GM intrusion: *A buyer approaches the dealer while the PCs are present, complicating the handoff.*

GM intrusion: *A police car arrives in the area and lingers for a while, interrupting or delaying the handoff.*

SUPPLYING THE DEALERS

This encounter is similar to the Handling Payroll encounter, except that it's Claire bringing pre-measured packages of drugs (a.k.a. "the product") for delivery to distributors and dealers in Mr. Shark's territory. Each package contains an assortment of drugs, depending on which dealer it goes to and the sort of clientele they interact with. (Some of these dealers have other people who work under them, either permanently or seasonally, but Claire lets them handle that and doesn't micromanage things.)

Unlike with the cash deliveries, Claire accompanies the PCs on the first set of drops so the recipients know to trust that the characters aren't trying to entrap them. Her curt statement "Accept deliveries from these people as if they were me, whether they're together or alone" is enough to convince the dealers. Instead of Emily's letter and number codes, Claire identifies her packages with colored lines. The names, codes, personal descriptions, and dealer locations are as follows:

- **Blackjack (purple):** Tall and tough middle-aged blonde woman, has snake tattoos, wears a lot of leather. Dive bar or biker bar.
- **Drummer (red):** Nondescript person of medium height, maybe age 30, black fingernail polish, wearing a hoodie with a pixelated pattern. Noisy club.
- **Hatchet (black and yellow):** Small, willowy, blue hair, androgynous (but may present as more masculine or feminine on some days). Could pass for 18 or 30 depending on clothing, posture, and makeup. Fast food restaurant.

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- **Madhouse (green):** Charming frat boy who dresses well, early 20s, hoop earring. College.
- **Poison (blue):** Stereotypical male ex-convict, large, smoker, beard. Pushing 40. Cheap hotel.

The dealers hand over the money from what they sell by using a series of dead drops, which is collected by other agents and delivered to Claire and Emily.

Once Claire is satisfied that the PCs can handle these kinds of deliveries, she no longer accompanies them. And after the PCs get to know these people a little bit better, they might have conversations with them.

SIDE EVENT: THE BURNED SPOT

The second time the PCs go to Randi's laboratory to pick up a new shipment of drugs, they approach from a different direction (perhaps due to weather or traffic) and spot something they didn't see the first time: a large burned area on the wall on the alley side of the building (or behind the building where the trash/recycle bins are, if an alley isn't appropriate for your city). The burned area is about 6 feet (2 m) across and 10 feet (3 m) high on the wall and about half that size on the ground, as if something caught on fire while it was against the wall, but the blaze didn't really harm the building or the ground. There is a thin layer of ash, mostly on the ground, but no obvious indication of what was burned.

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Depending on the skills, abilities, and experiences of the PCs, you should allow them to learn some of the following things about the burned area:

Religious power aversion, page 166

- Any PC with an aversion to religious power feels slightly uncomfortable near the burn, in a way that feels like their aversion is being triggered. (Perhaps someone burned a religious symbol, or someone wearing such a symbol was burned to death here.)

Savant, page 148

- Any PC with enhanced senses (such as the savant blood shift for perception) or skill in forensics who carefully examines the ash can tell that there was blood involved. If the PC has ever smelled vampire blood (such as if they've been wounded, or another vampire has been wounded near them), they also realize that the ash smells more like vampire blood than human blood.
- If the PCs ask Randi or the other researchers about the burned area, they say it was there one day when they came to work in the late morning, but they don't remember any fire alarms or emergency vehicles responding to it. If asked to speculate, Randi thinks it probably was teenagers or a crackhead messing around. If asked when it happened, they can narrow it down to one or two days (which, unknown to Randi's team, happens to be the three-day blackout period that the PCs were unconscious and turning into vampires).

Let the PCs get at least a small clue about this location. If they try to learn something, even if they don't have appropriate skills or roll poorly, give them a hint.

For your eyes only at this time: What happened here is a vampire was incinerated so quickly that the flames didn't have time to ignite the building. Which vampire, and who killed them, will be revealed in a later adventure in this book.

GOING SHOPPING

Emily contacts the PCs to say they need to visit Randi to collect a list of chemical reagents she needs transported from the manufacturer's warehouse to her laboratory. Because the chemicals are valuable and dangerous if spilled, protocol is for Mr. Shark to send a person of authority (in this case, one or more PCs) from his organization to sign for the chemicals and escort them to the lab, making sure that the delivery arrives on time and safely. Randi shows the PCs an invoice from the manufacturer listing five chemicals that are ready for pickup, a city hazmat certification document for the lab (showing that it has been cleared to store these materials), and a notarized statement from her authorizing the PCs to pick up the shipment (a document they'll also use in future pickups). On this first run, Randi drives the van to the warehouse so she can introduce the PCs to the manager there.

The chemical warehouse is on the outskirts of your city, probably near a dock or railway for easy deliveries from out of state. The manager is a bored but efficient man named Sedowski, who greets Randi flatly, checks off the items on her invoice, and allows her to inspect the items: four 30-gallon barrels (each weighing over 250 pounds) and one plastic crate (weighing about 100 pounds). Sedowski uses a small forklift

Sedowski: *level 2, bureaucracy and resisting intimidation as level 3*

GM intrusion: *One of the barrels has a small leak, creating a poisonous spill or fumes in the van and requiring the PCs to rush it back to the manufacturer for a replacement before anyone gets hurt.*

GM intrusion: *A fender-bender on the way back from the supplier pops open the doors of the van, which draws attention from passersby and police, who suspect criminal activity or a terrorist plot.*

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to load the items into the van, then it's just a matter of driving back to the laboratory, unloading them using a portable ramp and a hand truck, and parking the van in a designated space.

As with the other tasks Emily and Claire have been giving the PCs, after the characters have done it once, they'll be expected to do it on their own in the future without assistance.

SIDE EVENT: STOLEN BLOOD

The PCs hear (probably through TV, newspapers, or the internet) about a recent local event, which is one of the following crimes:

- Someone broke into a hospital and stole some equipment and blood from the blood bank.
- Someone stole a bloodmobile after a donation event. The customized vehicle was found hours later, covered in graffiti, stripped of anything valuable, with all of the blood missing.

Police currently have no leads, and rumors are spreading about a Satanic cult, a group of organ thieves who needed to replace their equipment, scientists conducting illegal stem cell research, and a gang of junkies in search of needles and drugs. If the PCs investigate, they don't find any clues (unless you want to introduce an early side adventure involving another group of vampires), but they learn the typical capacity of the bloodmobile or blood bank (dozens or hundreds of pints).

For your eyes only at this time: Vampires from a rival gang stole the blood so they'd have a stockpile for emergencies if they ever needed to stop killing for a while.

ENTREPRENEURIAL COCKROACHES

Claire tells the PCs to talk to Madhouse (or another one of Mr. Shark's dealers, if the PCs have a closer connection to a different one) about some new people who are selling drugs in the boss's turf. Madhouse says that three dealers have been active in his area for a few days, competing with him for clients. He contacted Claire because he wasn't sure if he was supposed to deal with these "cockroaches" himself or if the PCs should do it. He has descriptions of all three of them but has personally gotten a glimpse of just one—Ferret (before he got into a car and drove off).

- **Chili:** Bleached-blond hoodie-wearing grunge fan, early 20s, likes expensive sneakers.
- **Ferret:** Dopey-looking tall man with a buzz cut and his right wrist in a cast, early 20s.
- **Salty:** Excitable man with tattoos and a scruffy beard, late 20s.

These three guys don't have a grand plan. They just found out how to do a bathtub "cook" of street drugs and accidentally ended up making a high-quality batch. They used some of it and decided to sell the rest, and because they happened to know Madhouse's area pretty well, that's where they chose to sell. How to deal with this problem (recruit them, scare them off, or kill them) is up to the PCs.

STEAL THE BLOODMOBILE

There are many reasons why the PCs might decide to steal an existing blood supply—they're still struggling with killing people for food, they need to lay low for a while, they want to stock their chiller in case of emergencies, and

"Cockroach" dealers: *level 2*

GM intrusion: *One of the cockroaches has a connection (such as a relative) to a criminal gang that controls another part of your city, which ends up escalating the rivalry between that gang and the PCs.*

Vampire Slang, page 180

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so on. Fortunately, this is such a rare crime that whether the PCs target a blood bank or a bloodmobile, security is likely to be very low. It's not like a hospital keeps an armed guard on its blood storage area, and bloodmobiles use normal car door locks (and are designed to handle a flood of people going in and out of them). The only real risks are getting caught, transporting the bulky blood to a safe location, and making sure that Emily and Claire don't find out about this "extracurricular" crime that might draw negative attention to the rest of the business.

Stealing from a blood bank ends up much like a regular sort of heist, either done with stealth or performed in plain sight (perhaps by the PCs disguising themselves as nurses in the hospital and putting in a request from the blood bank in anticipation of a road collision with many casualties). Stealing from a bloodmobile might involve taking the vehicle to a different location before looting it, carjacking a full bloodmobile on its way to the blood bank, or swapping full coolers for empty ones while the blood drive is ongoing.

A BIG BUYER

Emily or Claire contacts the PCs with a time-sensitive transaction involving a buyer from outside the city. This buyer, a woman named Ferrer, previously bought a small sample of Mr. Shark's drugs to test how popular they might be in her city, and she's decided to make a larger short-term investment with the potential of permanently opening up a new market in her area. Ferrer is somewhat suspicious of Mr. Shark and his people, so the exchange is taking place in a public park, with both sides bringing security—she is accompanied by three plainclothes police detectives from her city, and Claire is bringing the PCs. She insists that the PCs openly wear pistols, even if they don't normally use firearms, to show that Shark's people are armed and taking this seriously. She also has them carry three padlocked suitcases (the drugs they're selling).

Ferrer is about fifty years old with a streak of grey in her blonde hair, a medium build, and a sad expression and heavy lines on her face. Her guards are a mixed bag as far as appearances go, but they're all armed and look competent to deal with trouble.

Claire is willing to initiate the conversation but wants a more talk-oriented PC to take over once she's introduced them, just so Ferrer can get to know the PCs. She insists that they shouldn't explain Mr. Shark's absence other than to say he's dealing with a family emergency.

To seal the deal, the PCs must succeed at four persuasion tasks. Each time they fail, the number of successes they need increases by one. If they succeed at closing the deal, Ferrer shakes hands with the lead PC and has one of her guards retrieve two suitcases of money from her car. They exchange suitcases, and then her group gets in their car and drives away.

If after at least three task rolls, the PCs have more failures than successes, Ferrer decides to back out of the deal and peacefully return home.

SIDE EVENT: A VICIOUS MURDER

This side event should happen toward the end of this series of encounters. The PCs hear (probably through TV, newspapers, or the internet) about a

Detectives (3): *level 3; perception, intuition, initiative, and detecting falsehoods as level 6; health 12; damage inflicted 4 points*

Detective, page 374

GM intrusion: *Something a PC does or says makes Ferrer or one of her bodyguards suspicious or angry, escalating the tension and requiring an additional success to close the deal; failure might lead to violence.*

Ferrer: *level 3; business, intimidation, persuasion, and resisting influence as level 4*

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particularly grisly killing in another part of town—a person was found dead in an alley with dozens of disfiguring wounds. The police haven't released all the details, but rumors are spreading that it was a gang retaliation, a rabid dog, or a serial killer on the loose. If the PCs investigate police records, the body, or the scene, they learn that despite the corpse's wounds, very little blood was found.

For your eyes only at this time: A savage vampire from a rival gang lost control while feeding, accidentally killed their prey, and tried to disguise the wounds from the attack instead of dumping the body where it wouldn't be found.

Ending the Adventure

Now that the PCs have seen how their part of the business works, they have a good idea of their responsibilities. Any of the above encounters could be repurposed as a one-off "filler" event where the PCs repeat a task they're familiar with, perhaps with a GM intrusion to make something routine more exciting.

XP Awards: The PCs each earn 2 XP for getting to know the workings of their new jobs, and an additional 1 XP if they investigate at least two of the side events and turn up information that might be useful later (or at least hints at the presence of other vampires in the city).

Savage, page 168

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This chapter is intended for GMs only.

Example Vampire Gangs, page 185

Chapter 17: Power Vacuum, page 195

Shadow Mob, page 186

"Gang War" is a series of escalating fights between the PC vampires and a rival vampire gang trying to take over the player characters' territory. At first the attacks take place on the PCs' turf, but eventually the PCs find a way to track down their rivals' lair and strike back to eliminate the threat.

BACKGROUND

The PCs aren't the only vampires left in the city, and by now they should strongly suspect that to be true even if they don't have any direct evidence. Just as the PCs have been establishing control over Mr. Shark's criminal enterprise, rival gangs of new vampires have been figuring out the criminal organizations they've inherited, to varying degrees of success, and one of them has started making forays into the PCs' turf.

The adventure takes place in the PCs' home city and the territory they control. If their home city is large enough to have multiple vampire gangs, the rival gang poking at them is probably from the same city. If the home city is too small for multiple vampire gangs, the attacks are coming from a nearby city, something within about an hour's drive (so the rivals have plenty of time to get there, cause trouble, and leave, all during the night hours).

Before you run this adventure, make sure you've created or chosen a vampire gang to be the PCs' adversaries and selected a territory for that gang to control, such as a territory adjacent to the area the PCs control, defined at the start of the "Power Vacuum" adventure. This adventure assumes the rival gang is the Shadow Mob. If you're using a different gang, replace the NPC vampires in this adventure (or just their names) with ones from the gang you chose.

SYNOPSIS

A rival vampire gang tries to take over the PCs' turf, first by looting one of their cash drop locations, then by attacking humans involved in their operation, and eventually by following and attacking the vampire PCs. When the PCs investigate, they find clues pointing to another ganglord (known as Mr. Arch) who controls an adjacent territory. The PCs confront Mr. Arch, who makes them an intriguing offer.

To keep pressure on the PCs, each of the encounters in this adventure should take place on successive nights. Not only does this create a sense of urgency, but it also forces the PCs to deal with these escalating threats while still making time to feed and handle any personal tasks (such as character arcs) requiring their attention.

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GETTING THE PCs INVOLVED

Emily and Claire take care of the boring, day-to-day operations of the business, and unless the PCs have a strong interest in logistics and accounting, they won't keep the PCs updated on routine matters. However, disruptions to the flow of money or drugs are never ignored, and Emily and Claire quickly inform the PCs about any problems in that area—and they expect the characters to take care of that sort of problem. The first sign of trouble is the theft of some cash a dealer put in a dead drop, and the second is physical attacks on members of the organization. If neither of those prompts the PCs to take action, a third event is a direct attack on the PCs themselves, which draws them into the open conflict.

THEY TOOK OUR CASH

Claire contacts the PCs about several cash payments from dealers being stolen. Normally the dealers put the business's weekly cut of their drug sales into a dead drop, which is collected by other agents of the business and handed over to Claire and Emily. However, last night two different drop stations (used by two different dealers) were broken into and completely looted. One event like this wouldn't be out of the ordinary, as these things sometimes happen, but two in the same night, with the same modus operandi, is clearly a targeted attack on the organization. The thieves took several thousand dollars total—an annoyance, but not a significant blow to the organization.

Claire finds out about this early in the morning and tells the PCs immediately. The daylight may mean they aren't able

A dead drop is a secure, nondescript armored slot in a wall, similar to a bank deposit box.

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to talk to her until sundown, or they'll have to deal with their sunlight aversion somehow and talk to her while they're groggy due to their need for day-sleep.

Sunlight aversion, page 167

Vampire Sleep, page 164

Claire tells the PCs that security cameras at the drop locations were disabled prior to the attacks and don't have any nearby footage, but she's managed to get hold of video from other cameras nearby (traffic cameras, a convenience store across the street, or something similar). The recordings show two individuals at each location breaking into the boxes at about the same time (roughly 2 a.m.). All four individuals are wearing black clothing, and they may be using some sort of video-scrambling technology because the footage of them is distorted enough that they are just a blurry mess.

Any vampire with an aversion to mirrors immediately recognizes this blurring as similar to what happens to them on camera, and probably has a little stomach flop in reaction to seeing it, even though it's not their own image. Mirror aversion, page 166.

Claire plans to change all the drop locations within the next twenty-four hours, put extra eyes on the new and old spots, and have (bribed) police examine the broken boxes, but she doesn't expect to find anything. The PCs can do likewise on their own initiative and may have special abilities that help them find out more. One thing they can easily notice from the footage is that the burglars were able to break in and steal the cash quickly, despite the reinforced steel of the metal drop boxes. If the PCs examine the boxes in person, they realize that even with tools like crowbars, it should have been more difficult to break in the way the burglars did—assuming they had human-level strength.

If the PCs have a deeper personal connection to other dealers on their team, have those dealers be the ones who get attacked to give the players a stronger emotional reaction to it. Dealers, page 198.

GM intrusion: *One of the dealers passes out while talking to the PCs and sets off a medical alarm, prompting a doctor or nurse to step into the room to check on them and perhaps administer medicine to stabilize or relax them.*

SIDE EVENT: GANG SIGNS

Between the first and second encounters, casually mention that the PCs spot new graffiti in their territory. (Choose a name, symbol, or code used by the rival gang that's making a move on their turf.) It might be near the location of the damaged drop box, on their way to the next encounter, or seen while they're off on a personal errand.

DRACULA ATTACKS

Late the night after the cash was stolen, Emily contacts the PCs to say that two of their "street-level sales agents" (as she calls the dealers the PCs know) were attacked and beaten badly enough to put them in the hospital. She asks the PCs to come to the hospital to speak to them about the attacks while she takes care of the medical paperwork.

Blackjack has a broken arm and broken jaw, and Poison has a concussion and a broken leg, but both are expected to survive. Their stories are similar—they were working (selling product) when they suddenly got jumped by two or three people wearing rubber Dracula Halloween masks, who proceeded to beat the crap out of them. One of the attackers was using a club or perhaps a nightstick, but the other (or others) just punched and kicked them, laughing the whole time. The ambush was so fast and the attackers were so strong that the dealers didn't have a chance to defend themselves, and they were taken out in just a few seconds. Then the assailants grabbed the product and left, and the next thing the dealers knew, they were in ambulances.

The dealers are worried that the PCs (and Emily) think this might be a scam to sell the "stolen" drugs on the side for extra profit. They swear that they're loyal to them and to Shark, and once they're back on their feet and selling

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again, they'll voluntarily reduce their own cut of the profits to pay back the loss. They're telling the truth about everything that happened.

When the PCs finish questioning the dealers, Emily finds them at the hospital and says that another group of people wearing Dracula masks broke into the laboratory and smashed some things. One researcher was there at the time (napping in an office) and got roughed up a bit, but not as badly as the two dealers; that person is at a different hospital. Emily texts Claire and Randi to meet her at the lab to evaluate the damage. If the PCs don't seem to have a plan for what to do next, she asks them to spend the rest of the night checking on the other dealers to make sure they aren't jumped too (she's already texted them a warning to be on their guard).

SIDE EVENT: GANG SIGNS 2

Soon after the PCs leave the hospital, casually mention that they notice another location or two that has been tagged with new graffiti (again, from the same rival gang). This might be near where one of the dealers was attacked (if the PCs investigate it) or near or on Randi's laboratory. If the graffiti is on the lab, it doesn't have any causal connection to the burned spot, although it might be on the same wall.

GUARDS ON ALERT

If the PCs check up on the other three dealers, they're all fine, appreciate the backup, and are not attacked that night.

If the PCs go to the laboratory, Emily and Randi check the damage and report that nothing particularly expensive was broken—a lot of glassware, some computer keyboards, and so on, but none of the really valuable equipment was damaged, and none of it was stolen.

If the PCs go to the other hospital to talk to the injured researcher, they get a story similar to those of the attacked dealers.

Regardless of what the PCs do, they eventually get a message from Emily (or she tells them in person if they're with her) that Claire has been attacked in a parking garage, has been taken to the same hospital as the injured researcher, and is unconscious. By the time the PCs are able to reach someone at the hospital who can give them a report about her condition, Claire is in a coma, and the hospital staff say that she is in critical condition because of severe impact trauma (she's been beaten). While at the hospital, the PCs meet a police officer (one on Mr. Shark's payroll) who responded to the emergency call of shots fired at a parking garage; the officer doesn't have any further information about who attacked Claire, but does note that she was found with her pistol in hand. Emily meets up with the PCs at the hospital and is visibly upset when she hears about the extent of Claire's injuries (much more so than for the other attacks, as Claire is a friend as well as a coworker).

The PCs can investigate where the shooting happened (especially if they ask the police officer to get them within the crime tape perimeter), but they don't find anything of interest except three shells on the ground from Claire's pistol (obviously she fired three times) and a discarded Dracula mask in a corner of the parking garage.

Burned spot, page 199

GM intrusion: *While looking after the uninjured dealers, or on their way to visit the lab or the hospital researcher, the PCs spot a lurking figure, who escapes quickly when chased but accidentally drops a Dracula mask.*

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RUMBLE!

This encounter assumes that the rival gang is the Shadow Mob. If you're using a different gang, replace these vampires (or just their names) with ones from the gang you chose. Shadow Mob, page 186.

Endgame, Jumpcat, Origami, and X: *level 4, climb and stealth as level 5; health 15; damage inflicted 5; aversion (all actions hindered within short range of garlic, religious power, or sunlight, or two steps within immediate range); one member of the group has a special ability (page 183)*

All of the beatings thus far were warnings, meant to shake up the PCs and make them realize that their organization is vulnerable. The next attack, against the PCs themselves, is meant to show that they are vulnerable too. Four young vampires (created approximately the same time as the PCs) from the Shadow Mob have been keeping an eye on the PCs and decide to go after them when the time seems right. These vampires (Endgame, Jumpcat, Origami, and X) are confident enough to attack all of the PCs at once, but are happy to strike when the PCs are solo or in smaller groups. They won't break into the PCs' home, but they might wait for characters outside or at some other location they frequent.

During this fight, the rival vampires mock the PCs, taunting them by saying things like "Mr. Arch is gonna take over your turf," "Did your human pets get hurt?" and "Did you break your little chemistry set?" One of them might even pull out a Dracula mask from their pocket or backpack and contemptuously toss it aside, basically admitting that they're responsible for the previous incidents. They focus their attacks on the weakest PC, use their abilities to distract and dodge the most dangerous PCs, and generally use smart tactics against their foes—after all, they've been watching the characters for a while and have a reasonable sense of what they can do.

The goal of these vampires is to merely shake up the PCs, not kill them; they want the PCs rattled enough that they'll agree to join their gang and work for their boss. If a PC drops, the NPCs turn to another PC instead of finishing off the fallen opponent. Likewise, the rival vampires aren't suicidal, and if the

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fight starts to go against them, they'll scatter and evade pursuit. If any of them are captured, they'll spill the beans in exchange for sparing their lives: they attacked Shark's people, broke into the laboratory, and have been tagging the PCs' turf with graffiti—all part of a plan by their leader (Mr. Arch) to take over Shark's territory now that he's gone.

If the PCs defeat these four vampires, you can create more encounters similar to this one on a different night, with a different group of young vampires working for Mr. Arch, to show the PCs that there's still a threat out there and it won't go away on its own. These later events might be hit-and-run attacks, particularly while the PCs are distracted by trying to hunt or feed, or more attempts to harass or harm their researchers, dealers, and other people on the payroll. At first they just cause property damage and some injuries, but eventually they escalate things to arson and murder to get the PCs to make a move against them.

If the PCs don't manage to capture one of the Shadow Mob and ask questions, they'll at least have the name "Mr. Arch."

SEEKING MR. ARCH

Now that the PCs have the name of Mr. Arch, they can do some investigating to find out more about their new enemy. Depending on the extent, nature, and success of their research, they can learn the following things:

- Jason Arch is an executive of L.A. Broxan Inc., a medium-size local construction company (which also happens to be a money-laundering operation for whatever criminal activity the local vampire gang runs).
- The construction company is owned by someone named Layla Aldam, known for her philanthropy and for being a recluse.
- Arch is a big man (somewhat paunchy and more than 6 feet tall), about forty years old, with a pompadour haircut and a fondness for nice suits.
- Arch lives in an expensive home in the city and usually is accompanied by at least one security guard.
- Arch frequently travels outside the city and the country to meet with politicians, business owners, and suppliers of construction materials.
- Arch is usually seen holding a glass of wine and is rumored to be an alcoholic.

Arch is a vampire, more powerful and experienced than those in his employ. He was created by Layla Aldam about ten years ago and has largely been running her criminal business for her, allowing her to focus on artistic and philanthropic pursuits. He was on a long redeye international flight from London when all the other vampires in the city (and perhaps the rest of the world) disappeared, leaving him fully in charge of the organization he had already been running from behind the scenes. Initially believing he was the last vampire left in the city, he planned to start expanding his operations into other parts of town when he realized that some of the earlier vampires (of the age and power level of Layla and Shark) had created new vampires and turned them loose, so he decided to bide his time a bit and see how the cards fell. Now that some time has passed and he believes the older vampires are definitely gone (at least for

GM intrusion: *One of the Shadow Mob vampires presents something that one or more PCs have an aversion to but none of the NPCs do, such as spilling a bag of garlic or a handful of tiny LED lights.*

Layla Aldam is (was?) a vampire on par with Mr. Shark, and likewise hasn't been seen since the PCs became vampires. Because she's known for being a recluse, her absence hasn't been noticed by the press.

GM intrusion: *A Shadow Mob vampire evades an attack or escapes the combat by using a bloodline ability, like making an illusion of being in the wrong place or turning into a large bat to fly away.*

Depending on your city, Mr. Arch's expensive home might be a mansion, house, condo, or penthouse apartment in a high-rise building. This adventure assumes he has a penthouse.

If the PCs directly ask the GM if they are able to find photos of Arch or Aldam during the day, they can't. But that doesn't mean such photos don't exist, so it's not proof that the two are vampires.

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Lenore Jones: *level 2, biochemistry and hematology as level 4*

Security guard (2): *level 2, perception and attacks as level 3; health 8; Armor 1; damage inflicted 3 points*

MR. ARCH

the foreseeable future), he's decided to move forward with his plans and deal with the competition. The immediate threat to that is the PCs, who seem to be more capable and better organized than the other vampire gangs that have come to power. His goal was not to eliminate the PCs, but to challenge them. Now that he's tested their mettle a bit, he thinks they'd be useful additions to his own business.

Arch knows the PCs are trying to find out more about him and probably want to retaliate against him for the attacks, so instead of commuting or traveling for the next few weeks, he plans to hole up in his home (where he has a small office), forcing the PCs to come to him. Like his minion vampires, he is aware of what the PCs can do and has taken special measures to fortify his home against anyone who thinks they can break in and start causing trouble (specifics about these measures are explained in the room descriptions in the next section of the adventure). He is prepared for a fight, but would rather talk to the PCs and reach an amicable conclusion.

If the PCs contact Arch about setting up an appointment, he agrees to a meeting in his home. He doesn't specifically ask for the meeting to be at night—he waits for the PCs to make that request. If they don't, he suggests 2 p.m., if only to potentially trick them into thinking he isn't a vampire or somehow doesn't know that the PCs are (despite the gang vampires obviously knowing they are). Of course, since he won't be leaving his home, he technically could take a break from his day-sleep to meet with them, but the PCs would likewise be penalized by forcing themselves awake to do that.

If the PCs stake out his home or otherwise spy on Arch, they find that every few days he is visited by a tall redheaded woman who always brings a briefcase. Her name is Lenore Jones, and although these visits make it appear that she is in a relationship with Arch, their arrangement is platonic—she is a biochemist and has been doing research (funded by Layla and now Arch) on unusual blood samples provided by her patrons. She doesn't know about vampires, so she thinks the vampire blood she's studying is human or near-human blood that's been radically altered by a virus. She has been focusing on its regenerative properties and why it seems to be more sensitive to certain chemicals. The PCs can try to persuade Lenore to let them visit Arch with her as another possible avenue to get into his home. (Remember that Arch continues to put pressure on the PCs by sending vampires to attack them every few days, so they can't afford to drag this out.)

ARCH'S HOME

Arch's home is a secure place—electronic locks on the doors, UV-resistant film on the windows to protect the living space against sunlight, and human security guards who communicate on a secure channel with earpiece radios. Additional security measures and the locations of the guards depend on the nature of the home (mansion, house, condo, or penthouse). For example, if the home is its own building with a yard, the security guards patrol the yard and there is a metal fence with a locked gate for the driveway, but a penthouse would have additional security in the main lobby, a secure parking garage,

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and a keycard-restricted elevator. Inside the home, all the lights are dim, almost like they're setting a romantic mood; it's bright enough to see but there are plenty of shadows.

The following notes provide general information about key rooms in Arch's penthouse. If in your city he lives in a home or mansion, adapt this information to the map you make or use for that.

Security Elevator: This elevator requires a keycard to get to the third floor or higher (the first two floors are offices, a private gym, facilities for security guards, janitorial closets, and so on). The interior of the elevator is mirrored on all four sides, triggering an aversion for some vampires. One upper corner of the elevator has an obvious black glass dome shielding a closed-circuit camera. Even if the PCs use a keycard to access the upper floors, the elevator won't open onto the penthouse level unless a penthouse keycard is used or someone in the foyer presses a button.

Bedrooms: Arch's bedroom is the master bedroom; it has a large bed and a lot of framed science fiction art on the walls. The two bedrooms on the opposite side of the foyer belong to Erica and Billy, his two vampire bodyguards. Erica is short and blonde with a round face, and Billy is tall and bearded; both are snappy dressers like Mr. Arch. The last bedroom (near Arch's) is an unoccupied guest bedroom.

Dining Room: This large room has a medium-sized dining table and six chairs, with an excellent view out the window, and it's adjacent to a large kitchenette. A small screen on one wall can pivot on a hinge to allow this room to double as a meeting room with videoconferencing.

Mirror aversion, page 166

The kitchenette isn't suitable for cooking for six people, so most group meals served in the dining room are probably catered or delivered.

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Mr. Arch: *level 6, defenses as level 7; health 21; Armor 1; can drain blood from an adjacent human to regain 10 health; one additional special ability (see page 214)*

GM intrusion: *Arch momentarily transforms into mist, negating one physical attack against him and allowing him to move an immediate distance.*

Obviously, the foyer screen lets people see if anyone in the elevator has a distorted appearance on camera, such as from having a mirror aversion.

Foyer: The wall near the elevator has a large flatscreen video feed of the elevator camera, allowing anyone here to see who is approaching. Two security guards patrol in and out of this room every few minutes, so there's one here at all times (they otherwise alternate between the dining room and the living room). In addition to the security button that opens the elevator door and an intercom button, there's a button marked "SILGARHO." If pressed, it sprays a dense mist into the elevator consisting of metallic silver, powdered garlic, and holy water, triggering any appropriate aversions for vampires in the elevator (because the vampires are coated with this mist, they're within immediate range of these substances for the next minute or until they can wash off the spray).

Living Room: This is a large and open room with expensive leather couches, a heavy wooden coffee table, a very nice view from the windows, and a large flatscreen TV on the west wall. An accordion-style partition can be pulled out of the wall to close it off from the dining room.

Office and Armory: This room has an elegant wooden desk and office chair, and a large gun cabinet with several firearms and boxes of ammunition, including a total of 20 silgarho bullets.

Silgarho bullet, page 133

Study: There is a small refrigerator built into the wall, well stocked with bottles of blood mixed with wine.

Eating Human Food, page 163

GM intrusion: *The windows in Arch's home are made of shatter-resistant glass, hindering by two steps any attempt to shoot or break through them.*

It is standard practice for the guards to spray the elevator with mist before letting anyone in, even if the visitors are believed to be friendly. If the guards think the visitors are hostile, they spray them and leave the elevator door closed (forcing the visitors to break it open or bypass the elevator's electronic lock).

What happens in this encounter largely depends on how the PCs approach this location. If they attempt to sneak or break in and start a fight, Arch and his guards respond in kind, although Arch tries to get the PCs to cease fighting and talk first.

If the PCs approach openly or with a clever story (such as using Lenore as their way in), Arch invites them in and explains what he wants. He is willing to talk about vampires in front of his human security guards and vampire bodyguards, but not in front of Lenore; if the PCs seem amenable to talking in more detail, he has a human security guard escort her out so he and the PCs can speak candidly.

Arch is a smooth talker, but somewhat arrogant. He can be friendly or subtly condescending. He doesn't feel threatened by the PCs at all—he is in his home, ready to use his vampire abilities and backed up by his well-trained guards. He likes to play at being a gracious host and offers the PCs some blood wine from his own collection (and toasts them with it to show that it's not poisoned or contaminated). The following topics are things he will explain or is willing to talk about:

- Like the PCs, he is a vampire. Unlike the PCs, he's been one for about ten years and has had a lot of time to practice and perfect his abilities.
- His creator, Layla Aldam, was a rival of Shark, and presumably a vampire of about the same era.
- Layla, Shark, and all the other vampires he knows of disappeared on the same night, and he hasn't heard anything from them since. He assumes they're all dead. He doesn't know what's responsible and doesn't really care.

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- He was on a long redeye international flight from London that night, which is perhaps why he escaped their fate. This left him in charge of Layla's business, which he was already running for her.
- When he discovered the new vampires Layla had created in her territory, he recruited them to work for him.
- He is aware of other groups of vampires running around the city, claiming their own territories.
- Of these rivals, only Shark's recruits—the PCs—have any sense of organization and were the primary threat to his plans for expansion. Therefore he had his new vampire employees target Shark's people to see how competent they were. There was nothing personal about it.
- He wants to take over Shark's territory and operations. He'd like the PCs to join him as his lieutenants. They would continue much as they had been, but a portion of their territory's revenue would be diverted to him. However, they could increase the scale of their operations and use his dealers to sell their product in his (Layla's) territory, so it shouldn't have much of an impact on their income.
- Once Shark's territory is secure, he'll consolidate the rest of the city under him, even if that means killing other vampires who resist him.
- He doesn't have a strong personal attachment to any of the Shadow Mob vampires in his territory. If the PCs have a grudge against any of them, he's willing to look the other way as long as it doesn't disrupt his operations or look like he ordered a hit on them.
- He'll give the PCs two days to think about his offer—they need to answer him by an hour after sundown two nights from now. He is willing to discuss certain concessions as part of the arrangement (for example, the PCs might want him to pay for the medical bills of their injured human allies), but he is clear that this is a takeover, not an alliance; the PCs will be employees, not partners.

Keep in mind that Arch has been running Layla's criminal organization for more than five years and has been living as a vampire for longer than that. He's ruthless (he had the PCs' human allies beaten as a test) and is quite comfortable with his role as a blood-drinking predator. If the PCs are still holding on to the idea that they're the antiheroes of this story, they should realize that Arch is a murderous ganglord, and allying with him or working for him means they're joining with a very bad person.

If a fight happens (either now or later), Billy and Erica focus on taking down the most dangerous vampire PC. They continue to fight as long as Arch is alive, because they know he'll be angry if they flee or surrender. Each has one pistol loaded with normal bullets and another loaded with silgarho bullets, and they're observant enough to realize when a silgarho bullet strikes a vampire with an aversion (otherwise, they don't waste silgarho bullets on vampires who aren't averse to at least one of those substances).

Ending the Adventure

If the PCs don't give Arch an answer by his deadline (just after sundown two nights from now), he assumes they're refusing his offer to join him, and he

GM intrusion: *Arch grabs and throws a character through one of the exterior windows (assuming you didn't previously decide the windows were shatter-resistant).*

GM intrusion: *Arch catches a character in his powerful grip, automatically inflicting damage each round until the character breaks free.*

GM intrusion: *After making an attack, Arch immediately follows up with another attack against a nearby foe.*

Billy and Erica (vampire bodyguards): *level 4, attack and defend against vampires as level 5; health 15, Armor 1; damage inflicted 4 points; silgarho bullets; can drain blood from an adjacent human to regain 5 health*

GM intrusion: *Billy or Erica speedily dodges, blocks, or deflects an attack made on them and retaliates with a pistol attack.*

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steps up the attacks on them, arming his gang vampires with silgarho bullets and sending Erica and Billy along to help the gang finish the job.

If the PCs agree to work for Mr. Arch, he has them explain the new hierarchy to their human allies. Some of those humans may quietly leave town in the next few weeks to avoid trouble; Claire in particular thinks this would be a good time to retire. Things settle down in Shark's territory, which the PCs continue to run, as Arch focuses his attention on other adjacent territories. He uses his local vampire minions to strike out at other neighbors similar to how they attacked the PCs.

If the PCs fight Mr. Arch, he tries to kill as many of them as possible, not pulling any punches, and fleeing only if it looks like they have a good chance of killing him. Erica, Billy, and any human security guards present fight as long as Mr. Arch does, but they may surrender or flee if he's dead or escapes. If Arch is dead, Erica, Billy, and the human guards can be convinced to work for the PCs in Shark's territory, or even convinced to help the PCs take over Arch's business and work for them in that territory.

With Arch out of the picture, the Shadow Mob vampires in his territory are in a bad place, as the people their old boss had them attack are now in charge. Some of them will swear loyalty to the PCs in exchange for their lives, others will join other gangs, and some will skip town to avoid the heat.

XP Awards: The PCs each earn 1 XP for investigating the cash thefts and the laboratory break-in, 1 XP for investigating the attacks on their dealers and Claire, 1 XP for the interactions with the rival gang vampires, and 1 XP for confronting Mr. Arch.

Arch's Special Abilities

Arch should be a tough opponent for the PCs and an example of what a powerful vampire can do. Choose one or two abilities from this list, preferably ones that the PCs can't yet access with their bloodlines and that would be effective at bypassing a PC's protections or resisting a PC's special attack.

- Step into shadows or behind cover and immediately hide. This lasts until he attacks or moves out of the shadows or from behind cover.
- Invasively read the thoughts of one opponent within short range, easing his attacks and defenses against that foe until he uses this ability on someone else.
- Change into a cloud of mist for up to ten minutes, gaining an asset on sneaking and Speed defense and becoming immune to physical attacks (but not energy attacks or mental attacks). While mist, he loses the benefit of worn armor.
- Transform his hand into shadowy darkness and make a melee attack that ignores his foe's armor.
- Fill a creature within short range with fear, as if Arch were its worst nightmare. The creature is paralyzed, runs away, or takes some other action appropriate to the circumstances. The creature can try another Intellect defense roll as an action each round to end the fear.

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"The Hunted" is an open-ended adventure where the PCs realize there is something powerful hunting vampires in their city and come up with a long-term plan for surviving this new and overwhelming threat.

Background

By the end of the "Gang War" adventure, the PCs have defended their territory against Mr. Arch, joined with him, or taken over as the most powerful group of vampires in the city. They might be content with their current territory and profits, or they might be looking to expand their operation, eliminating or absorbing the competition. While the PCs work on those plans (as well as whatever character arcs they have for their own lives), whatever destroyed or drove out all the older vampires in the city has returned and started to attack the newest generation of vampires.

Before you run this adventure, make sure you've divided up your city into territories controlled by various vampire gangs and updated that information based on the outcome of "Gang War." In particular, you need to know what other gangs are still around and what their turf is. This adventure assumes it's the Bloodhound vampires who attempt to negotiate with the PCs.

Synopsis

Either the PCs are flush with power from their victory over Mr. Arch or they've cemented their place in the city as his new lieutenants. Other vampires in the city hear about this and know to respect or avoid the PCs because of their physical power and criminal influence. After a short lull where the PCs have time to start pushing their own agenda on a larger scale, some vampires start to go missing, and a group of vampires that aren't overtly hostile to the PCs approaches them for advice and help. If the rival vampires believe the PCs are responsible, they want to know how to stay off the hit list. If they don't think the PCs are behind these disappearances, they want the PCs' help or at least an agreement to cease hostilities until the threat is ended.

At an inopportune time for the PCs, the instigators of these attacks reveal themselves—fundamental angels who have decided to eliminate all vampires from the earth. Confronted by entities they cannot defeat, the PCs have to go on the run as the hunters become the hunted. Fortunately, they discover one or two potential ways out of an eternity of pursuit, though both have a terrible cost: find a cure for vampirism so the angels are no longer interested in them, or summon an ancient blood god that can create a safe haven for the undead.

This chapter is intended for GMs only.

Chapter 18: Gang War, page 204

Fundamental angel, page 110

Gangs of the City, page 182

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GETTING THE PCs INVOLVED

The plot for this adventure will come to the PCs—first as other vampires approach them for help, then as the angel adversaries attack.

Red Devils, page 186

BEGGING FOR HELP

Some time has passed since the end of the previous adventure (anywhere from two to six weeks) and the PCs have been taking care of business as usual, either on their own behalf or working for Mr. Arch. Claire has awakened from her coma and is on the road to recovery, although whether she decides to remain active or retire depends on how the PCs handled Arch and his cronies.

The PCs get a message from one of their human contacts (perhaps Emily or one of their drug dealers) stating that three members of a rival criminal organization in another part of the city have requested to meet with them tonight or tomorrow night to "discuss some missing people," and the PCs can choose a neutral spot to meet. By this point in the story, the PCs should understand that the rivals are vampires from another gang. They should negotiate a date and place (either directly with these people or through their human contacts, clearing it with Mr. Arch if he is still in the picture), and they can take whatever precautions they want for their safety. It's hard to read intent through texts, but the NPC vampires are curt and don't seem like they're planning a trick.

At the time of the meeting, three vampires from the Bloodhound gang (Lightning, Quitter, and Snake) show up a little early, looking nervous. Once everyone is confident the meeting isn't going to turn into a bat fight, the gang members explain that they've been trying to form an alliance with the vampires of the Red Devils, but the Red Devils suddenly stopped responding, and nobody else has heard from them since. Snake wants to know if the PCs have heard anything about them (they haven't) or if the PCs were responsible for taking them out (they weren't). Snake and her crew don't have any useful information for the PCs—the negotiations with the Red Devils seemed like they were going well, so it's weird that they would just up and vanish and leave their organization headless and vulnerable. Snake's people say they'll look out for the Red Devils and let the PCs know what's up—Snake has a healthy respect for the PCs and doesn't want to start any trouble for them.

This encounter ends when the PCs decide to end the meeting.

If the Bloodhounds are no longer around, choose a different gang and different vampires to meet with the PCs.

Bloodhounds, page 185

FEAR NOT!

This encounter takes place immediately after the meeting with the Bloodhounds. Two or three fundamental angels appear out of nowhere, having finished off the vampires of the Red Devils and supernaturally tracked the vampires of the Bloodhounds.

Fundamental angels (2 or 3): *level 7, attacks vampires as level 8; health 35; Armor 2; damage inflicted 8 points up to long range; automatically inflicts 4 points of damage against all creatures within short range unless it shields itself from them; attacks count as religious power or sunlight for vampire aversions; frightens creatures that see it unless they make an Intellect defense roll. See page 110.*

The angels don't appear to be speaking English, but everyone can understand them perfectly, and they can simultaneously say different things to different people.

The angels are direct in proclaiming their judgment against the vampires, saying "YOU ARE A CORRUPTION OF THE NATURAL ORDER AND WILL BE PURGED FROM THE MORTAL WORLD." They ignore any humans present except to say "FEAR NOT! YOU ARE IN THE PRESENCE OF THE DIVINE!" although humans might still be afraid and run away.

The angels don't care if they are witnessed by humans, as human minds are good at rationalizing unbelievable

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things they don't understand. *Maybe I was a little drunk. I was woozy from the heat. I was having a problem with my medication.* And so on. They do shield the humans from their damaging auras, which doesn't protect the vampires at all, and they do not directly harm the humans in any way.

Lightning, Quitter, and Snake completely freak out when the angels appear and try to get away by any means possible. The angels immediately attack, starting with the NPC vampires, coordinating their energy blasts and auras to destroy at least one NPC vampire (starting with Lightning) in the first round. This should be the first sign that the PCs are outmatched.

If the PCs flee, the angels pursue and destroy the other NPC vampires who were present. Given how quickly they eliminate the gang members, it's a safe bet that these are the beings that killed the Red Devils (and perhaps Mr. Shark and the older vampires) or forced them to hide. Unless the PCs linger in the area where the attack happens, they can evade the angels for about another day (during which time the angels eliminate other vampires in the city, including Mr. Arch, if he is still around). As long as the PCs remain in the city, the angels eventually find them, especially as the rest of the vampire population is eliminated and they can turn their attention exclusively toward the PCs.

Ending the Campaign

If the PCs are particularly powerful, they can keep fighting the angels every time they show up, but eventually the angels will arrive in larger and larger numbers and the PCs will have to flee or die. If the PCs decide to fight to the death, jump to Ending 1: Blaze of Glory.

If the PCs flee the city, it's just a matter of time—days, weeks, or perhaps a couple of months—before the angels catch up to them again, and they absolutely will not end their pursuit. The angels have already eliminated most of the vampires in the world, and eventually the PCs will make a mistake and get pinched. Choosing to escape and spend the rest of their existence on the run is a downer note for the campaign, much like a campaign with humans surviving in a zombie apocalypse that can never be reversed: an endless cycle of fleeing, fortifying, and fighting until the story becomes stale or the campaign plot jumps to something other than zombies. If the players can handle that sort of emotional letdown, it's okay to play a few more sessions under this paradigm, but there are two additional ways they can create a different and exciting end for this narrative.

If the PCs leave town, have Emily (or another human ally) contact them later to say that Mr. Shark left behind a document specifying what to do if the PCs (who are effectively his heirs) vanished under similar circumstances as his own disappearance. That document says for her to give them an encrypted digital archive (either as a download or on a thumb drive) of some of his personal notes. She doesn't have the password for the archive, but the PCs should eventually be able to figure it out (a variant of "vampires exist," "Shark is a vampire," or something similar that a player guesses) and unpack its contents. Depending on how you want the ending to go, giving the PCs this archive opens up one or two other possibilities: finding a cure for vampirism, or summoning a vampire

Why did the angels choose now to attack the vampires? Did a group of humans learn about the vampires and find a way to summon the angels to destroy them? Did the vampire population hit a critical point or power level that disturbed the angels' work? Is there a challenge on the horizon for the human race and the celestial realm wanted to make sure humans had a fair shot at making it? The angels aren't saying, but speculation is food for thought and grist for adventures.

You can decide if the archive has enough usable information to allow one of these options or both of them.

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blood god to save them from the angels.

Ending 1: Blaze of Glory

Death at the hands (?) of the fundamental angels is an easy choice, and it makes the PCs martyrs—perhaps a fitting end for criminals who tasted and enjoyed the supernatural powers of darkness. How they orchestrate their end is up to them and can be the exciting culmination of the story. Perhaps they want to take as many angels with them as possible. Maybe they draw out the fight to give other vampires the opportunity to escape. Or perhaps they hold a press conference in a public place, announce and demonstrate that vampires are real, and battle the angels to the death as a grand public spectacle that also reveals that angels are real (and nothing like how people pictured them). Any of these can be an interesting setup for a new campaign (with human player characters) in the same world after this paradigm shift has occurred.

Ending 2: Find a Cure

If you want this ending to be an option for the PCs, Shark's archive consists of hundreds of pages of scans, photographs, and audio interviews detailing everything he could find about the creation of vampires, metaphysical theories about how vampirism (a curse?) is transmitted by drinking a vampire's blood or biting humans, and theories about how to cure a vampire. After taking several days to read the whole archive, the PCs find notes by Shark about how he might use a cure as a weapon to eliminate rival vampires, and that all the information about realistic possibilities for a cure (rather than myths or speculation) is

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incomplete. The PCs realize that they'd have to finish the research on their own or try what they have and hope that it works. In theory, curing their vampirism would mean the PCs would no longer be hunted by the angels (because the angels did not harm any humans who were present).

The cure for vampirism should be dangerous. If it were an easy thing, it would be common knowledge among vampires, and the clever ones could work in groups to use it to avoid scrutiny by living as humans or vampires as the circumstances warranted. The cure should also be dark and come at a significant cost so that it's simpler to kill a vampire than to make them human again—even a sympathetic vampire hunter would balk at the cost of curing one bloodsucker.

One possibility for a dangerous, dark cure is an exchange transfusion, where the vampire is intravenously hooked up to a large supply of human blood while the vampire's blood is drained away. Because a healthy vampire's body will quickly infect this new blood with its corruption, the cure requires an ongoing flushing and infusion of blood (requiring over a hundred units of untainted blood), with the vampire's body becoming less satiated with supernatural power each minute until it finally passes an irrevocable threshold and becomes fully human. However, this cure is much like an addict going cold turkey in the middle of a drug den, as the vampire is effectively being starved while surrounded by the very thing it craves the most, and few vampires have the will to resist the urge to feed when their hunger is forced to such a peak. Interrupting the process by feeding ruins the attempt to cure them. Furthermore, using fresh blood (instead of stored blood) has the highest likelihood of success, meaning the cure needs a dozen or more healthy human donors, all of whom will die

This sort of cure might also work on vampirism with a viral rather than a supernatural origin.

The vampire movie Daybreakers *(2009) has a working cure that requires exposing a vampire to sunlight until they nearly die, essentially burning out the corruption within them, then shielding them at the last moment so they become human again (but still on the verge of death). This method requires a lot of painful attempts and precise timing to thread the needle between an ineffective cure and one that kills the vampire. Presumably, other strong or lethal aversions could be used (or combined) instead of sunlight, each with their own difficulties and risks.*

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Depending on your historical and mythological interest, you may want to choose a real-world primordial being or deity of blood to be the patron of all vampires, or you might create or borrow a fictional being like La Magra from the Blade comics and film, or Lilith or Cain from Vampire: The Masquerade.

Ideally, the number of powerful vampires (tier 3 or higher) needed for the ritual should be equal to the number of PC vampires minus one so the players have to decide (or fight over) which of them survives.

For an interesting twist, you could run a modern Cypher System game with human PCs set in a world where one city is openly ruled by vampires, with the surviving PC(s) from the last campaign at the top.

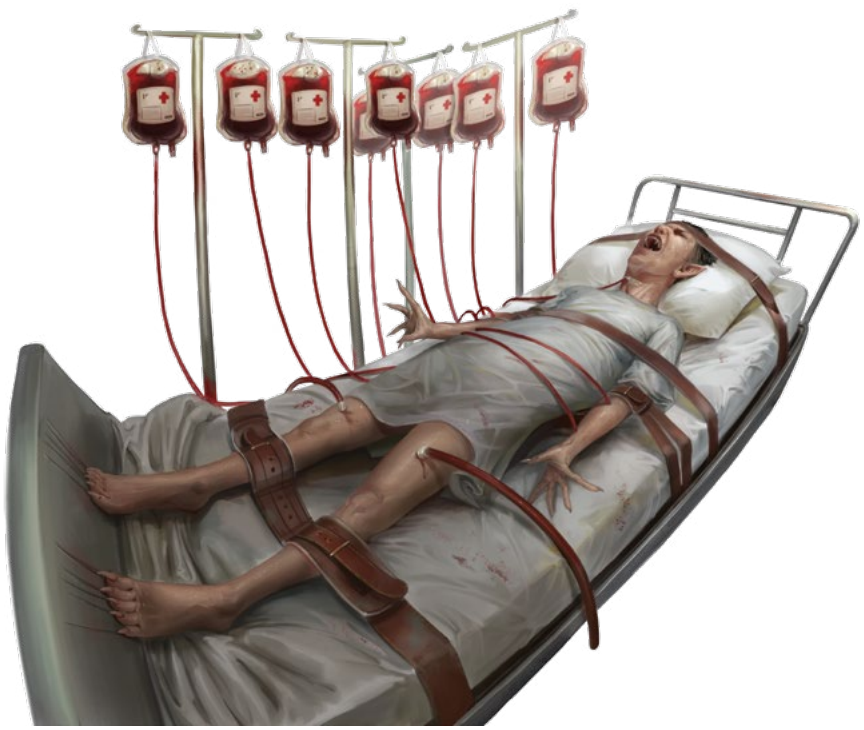
See the illustration for summoning the vampire god on page 9.

from blood loss unless they also are given transfusions (which, fortunately, could come from stored blood).

Once all the PCs are cured, they can try to resume their old lives or take on new challenges and identities elsewhere in the world. They'll never truly know if being cured was enough to save them, or if their brief lives as vampires are unforgivable offenses to the pursuing angels, and someday there will be a reckoning.

Ending 3: Summon the Blood God

In this setting, vampires are supernatural creatures, which allows for the existence of other supernatural beings such as angels and deities. Theoretically there could be a primordial vampire, or a god or goddess of vampires, who has the power to resist, banish, or destroy the crusading angels. However, this entity—whatever or whoever it may be—has not been seen since ancient times, and modern vampires either haven't heard of it or think it is just a myth.



If you want this ending to be an option for the PCs, Shark's archive consists of hundreds of pages of scans, photographs, and audio interviews detailing everything he could find about the history of vampires, a vampire blood god that created or protected them, and how to summon that entity. By spending a few hours going through the archive, the PCs learn that the god can elevate the powers of its worshipers (such as by granting them additional bloodline gifts or the ability to create new vampires) and could even make an entire city its sacred place, which would reduce or negate the effects of aversions on vampires and hedge out its supernatural enemies. However, after taking several days to read the entire archive, the PCs realize that the information about the summoning ritual isn't complete, and they'd have to improvise aspects of the ritual and hope that it still works.

Furthermore, the summoning requires a sacrifice; several vampires would have to give their lives to empower the ritual—perhaps several powerful ones or dozens of weaker ones, although the details are vague and imprecise. To succeed, the PCs would have to recruit or entrap many other new vampires to use as weak sacrifices (which assumes there are that many left in the world) or advance their own power (while evading angels) to the point that their potent blood is enough to empower the ritual. Any surviving PC would be in a unique position of political and supernatural power in the city blessed by the vampire god, but they could achieve it only by sacrificing their friends or a large number of other vampires—a pyrrhic victory that will make the survivor hated and feared by any vampires who take refuge in the city.

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Unease: All your actions are hindered. You are in the presence of something disturbing that risks breaking your worldview. You can feel that something is wrong, but you don't know exactly what, and you're not sure what to do about it. Your body isn't sure if it should jump into fight or flight, so you're anticipating a spike of adrenaline and it's very distracting.

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LAST SURVIVOR

SECRET TWIST

Don't let anyone else see this card. The killer has switched places with you, and you are now playing the killer who is *pretending* to be your original character. Example of this twist: *Face/Off*. You can use this card as a free level of Effort on one task when you hand it back to the GM.

SECRET TWIST

Don't let anyone else see this card. You're actually the killer and have been the whole time. (Or maybe there's more than one killer. Are you working together?) Play along, even if it looks like your character is killed. Examples of this twist: *Scream*, *The Thing*, *The Usual Suspects*. You can use this card as a free level of Effort on one task when you hand it back to the GM.

SECRET TWIST

Don't let anyone else see this card. Your doppelganger has switched places with you, and you are now playing the doppelganger who is *pretending* to be your original character. Examples of this twist: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *The Thing*, *Us*. You can use this card as a free level of Effort on one task when you hand it back to the GM.

SECRET TWIST

Don't let anyone else see this card. You realize that the other PCs are the real villains, and now you're trying to secretly help stop them. You can use this card as a free level of Effort on one task when you hand it back to the GM.

SECRET TWIST

Don't let anyone else see this card. You're actually allied with the bad guys and are plotting against the other PCs. You can use this card as a free level of Effort on one task when you hand it back to the GM.

SECRET TWIST

Don't let anyone else see this card. You realize that you're a ghost of someone who recently died, and the strange things you're experiencing are echoes from living people. You'll soon pass on to the other side (whatever that is). You can't tell the other PCs, but you can still help them with their journey. You can use this card as a free level of Effort on one task when you hand it back to the GM.

SECRET TWIST

Don't let anyone else see this card. You've been bitten. You're sure it'll be fine. Or at least fine long enough that you can help your friends get to safety. You're not ready to die yet. You're still useful. You can use this card as a free level of Effort on one task when you hand it back to the GM.

SECRET TWIST

Don't let anyone else see this card. You're actually an advanced machine pretending to be a regular human, and you're observing or plotting against the other PCs. You can use this card as a free level of Effort on one task when you hand it back to the GM.

SECRET TWIST

Don't let anyone else see this card. You're actually an alien pretending to be a regular human, and you're plotting against the other PCs. You can use this card as a free level of Effort on one task when you hand it back to the GM.

SECRET TWIST

Don't let anyone else see this card. It's meant to disguise that the GM could be giving an actual secret twist to one player. There is no secret twist for you, but you can use this card as a free level of Effort on one task when you hand it back to the GM.

SECRET TWIST

Do not let other players see this card. This card is just to disguise that the GM may give a real secret twist to another player. There is no secret twist for you, but you can use this card as a free level of Effort on one task when you hand it back to the GM.

SECRET TWIST

You can use this card as a free level of Effort on one task when you hand it back to the GM.

SECRET TWIST

You can use this card as a free level of Effort on one task when you hand it back to the GM.

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guilherme cosenza (Order # 26776915)

GM Name: _____

Player Name: (or leave blank) _____

Planned Game Theme: _____

If this game were a movie, its movie rating would be: G PG PG-13 R NC-17 Other: _____

Mark the color that best illustrates your comfort level with the following plot or story elements.

- ☐ **Green** = Enthusiastic consent; bring it on!
- △ **Yellow** = Okay if veiled or offstage; might be okay onstage but requires discussion ahead of time; uncertain.
- ⬡ **Red** = Hard line; do not include.

HORROR

	G	Y	R
Blood	☐	△	⬡
Body horror	☐	△	⬡
Bugs	☐	△	⬡
Demons	☐	△	⬡
Dolls	☐	△	⬡
Eyeballs	☐	△	⬡
Gore	☐	△	⬡
Harm to animals/children	☐	△	⬡
Mummies	☐	△	⬡
Occult/witchcraft/Satanism	☐	△	⬡
Rats	☐	△	⬡
Snakes	☐	△	⬡
Spiders	☐	△	⬡
Spirit boards/Ouija boards	☐	△	⬡
Tumors	☐	△	⬡
_____	☐	△	⬡

RELATIONSHIPS

	G	Y	R
Romance	☐	△	⬡
Fade to black	☐	△	⬡
Explicit	☐	△	⬡
Between PCs and NPCs	☐	△	⬡
Between PCs	☐	△	⬡
Sex	☐	△	⬡
Fade to Black	☐	△	⬡
Explicit	☐	△	⬡
Between PCs and NPCs	☐	△	⬡
Between PCs	☐	△	⬡
_____	☐	△	⬡

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ISSUES

	G	Y	R
Homophobia	☐	△	⬡
Racism	☐	△	⬡
Real-world religion	☐	△	⬡
Sexism	☐	△	⬡
Specific cultural issues	☐	△	⬡
_____	☐	△	⬡

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

	G	Y	R
Cancer	☐	△	⬡
Claustrophobia	☐	△	⬡
Darkness	☐	△	⬡
Drugs and addiction	☐	△	⬡
Freezing to death	☐	△	⬡
Gaslighting	☐	△	⬡
Genocide	☐	△	⬡
Heatstroke	☐	△	⬡
Natural disasters (earthquakes, forest fires)	☐	△	⬡
Paralysis/physical restraint	☐	△	⬡
Police, police aggression	☐	△	⬡
Pregnancy, miscarriage, or abortion	☐	△	⬡
Self-harm	☐	△	⬡
Severe weather (hurricanes, tornados)	☐	△	⬡
Sexual assault	☐	△	⬡
Starvation	☐	△	⬡
Terrorism	☐	△	⬡
Thirst	☐	△	⬡
_____	☐	△	⬡
_____	☐	△	⬡
_____	☐	△	⬡
_____	☐	△	⬡

ADDITIONAL TOPICS

_____	☐	△	⬡
_____	☐	△	⬡
_____	☐	△	⬡
_____	☐	△	⬡
_____	☐	△	⬡
_____	☐	△	⬡

Do you want the GM to follow up with you to clarify any of these responses? If so, which ones?

_____

_____

_____

_____

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STANDARD VAMPIRE ABILITIES

Pallor: Because in some ways you're technically dead, you don't look vibrant or healthy. No matter what your skin tone is, you look a little more pale than you did when you were alive. You might have dark circles under your eyes, or the whites of your eyes are discolored, or your face looks gaunt. Your skin is cold. There's something off about you or even sickly, like you have the flu, you're hung over, or you're really dehydrated. Makeup can help offset this look, but remember that you're also a supernatural predator, and that's unconsciously unnerving to people and animals. This look isn't enough to hinder social interactions, but people do tend to notice you and have a wary first impression. Enabler.

Undead Metabolism: Although vampires are mostly made of the same stuff as humans, vampire biology doesn't work quite like human biology. You are still considered a living creature for effects (such as an acid that damages flesh but not metal), but your Might defense rolls against disease and poison, and rolls to hold your breath, are eased by three steps. Enabler.

Vampiric Bite: You grab an opponent and immediately bite them (and can drink their blood if you want to). This attack is hindered by three steps, but the bite is eased because it is a light weapon, so overall it is hindered by only two steps. The bite inflicts 2 points of damage. Your foe can use its action to attempt to escape. After the first round, you can use your action to continue holding your foe, inflicting damage again and continuing to drink (unlike the initial attack, this action is not hindered). It takes three rounds to drink one meal's worth of blood.

In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to drain blood more quickly; each level of Effort used in this way reduces the time needed to finish a meal by one round. Action.

BLOOD SHIFTS

Blood shifts that affect your rolls are like permanent levels of Effort that are always active. They don't count toward your maximum Effort use (nor do they count as skills or assets). They simply ease tasks that fall into specific categories, which include (but are not necessarily limited to) the following.

△○○ **Accuracy:** All attack rolls

△○○ **Dexterity:** Movement, acrobatics, initiative, and Speed defense

△○○ **Healing:** One extra (one-action) recovery roll per day

△○○ **Intelligence:** Intellect defense rolls and all knowledge, science, and crafting tasks

△○○ **Resilience:** Might defense rolls and Armor (+1)

△○○ **Savant:** Two specific skills (other than attacks, defenses, or a special ability), such as history, perception, or persuasion

△○○ **Single Attack:** Attack rolls and damage (+3 points) for one specific kind of attack, such as "pistols," "kicks," or "Thrust"

△○○ **Special Ability:** Effects of one specific character ability, including damage for that ability (+3 points) if appropriate, but not attack rolls with that ability

△○○ **Strength:** All tasks involving strength, including jumping and dealing damage with melee or thrown attacks (+3 points), but not attack rolls

Each blood shift eases the task by one step (except for shifts that affect damage, Armor, or recovery rolls, as specified in the list above). Applying two shifts eases the task by two steps, and applying three shifts eases the task by three steps.

You can assign your blood shifts to your character however you want, to a maximum of three in any one category. Once the shifts are assigned, you usually can't change them.

○ = Permanent blood shift

△ = Temporary blood shift from feeding

YOUR VAMPIRE GIFTS, AVERSIONS, AND QUIRKS

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